THE EPIC OF DODO-CHANESAR

Edited, annotated and translated from the Sindhi originals by

Saleem Noorhusain

Culture Department,
Government of Sindh

Digitized By M. H. Panhwar Institute Of Sindh Studies, Jamshoro.

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First edition:	September 2011
Price: Pak. Rupees:	Rs: 300/=
US $:	6$

Printed by: Peacock Printers, Karachi. 253, international shopping & Business Center, Abdullah Haroon Road , Saddar , Karachi Sindh. Cell # 0300 2152634

Published by: Culture Department, Government of Sindh, Sir Hidayatullah Road, Opp. MPA Hostel, Karachi.

Ph # 021-99206073 - 99206144

پاران ايم ايڇ پنهور انسٽيٽيوٽ آف سنڌ اسٽڊيز، ڄامشورو۔

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Tale of Dodo-Chanesar is a war epic, which in the words of late Dr. N. A. Baloch, the doyen of research scholars in Sindh, is 'one of the greatest in world literature' and 'unique and unequalled in its originality, style and popularity.'

Dodo and Chanesar were two of the many Soomro dynasts, who ruled parts of Sindh intermittently from 12th to 14th centuries of the Christian Era. All the oral traditions of the Tale that have come down to us through the centuries, however, describe them as brothers, who fell apart over succession to the throne, and the older of them (Chanesar) brought in foreign forces to get him what he believed to be his right.

The esistance put up by the people of Sindh, both high and low, to thwart the advance of the invading army was so stiff that its exasperated commander exclaimed `It's as though pathways are fighting.' Such resistances occupy a glorious place in the history of Sindh for they epitomize the Sindhi peoples' struggle for national identity.

Mr. Saleem Noorhusain's rendering of the Tale into English is a 'Homeric task' and Culture Department feels elated in publishing it, more so because it fulfils what this Department is mandated, inter alia, to do, i.e., bring out books/ narratives on the province's history, semi-history, principal traditions, fantastic feats of its heroes and other accounts of the rich cultural heritage of Sindh.

Karachi; September 12, 2011

Abdul Aziz Uqaili
Secretary to the Govt. of Sindh,
Culture Department.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

People of Sindh have fought many wars against foreign invaders, and lost most of them on account not of courage and spirit, which was exemplary, but of out-of-date technology and poor strategy. Many tales have been woven around such wars, epitomizing the indomitable spirit and bravery of the warriors.

For some time past I've been toying with the idea of translating such tales into English. This translation of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar is a tentative step in this direction.

This Tale, with its no less than two and half score oral traditions, is perhaps the only epic of its kind. Translating it was not much of a problem. The actual difficulty lay in reconciling its different, and occasionally differing, accounts into a logical whole and reconstructing a single comprehensive account, which dispenses with the misfit and the abrasive to common sense but retains the integral ingredient of epic, the mythological, and, at the same time, takes care of the psychological makeup of all its characters. My attempts at such a reconciliation and reconstruction, I am afraid, have not been successful. I hope some one more qualified and imaginative and also with greater perseverance would undertake this daunting task.

If the addition of an opera and a play to the oral tradition of the Tale strikes a discordant note, so be it.

While translating, I have taken some liberties with regard to proper names:

- Contrary to the practice of using Sindhi plural of a

caste-name as singular in English, I have used Sindhi singular and suffixed letter 's' to denote plural.

- Vowels 'a', 'e' or 'o' in proper names have been doubled in accordance with their actual pronunciation in Sindhi.

I am deeply obliged to

- Mr. Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo for his 'Preface' to this work.

- Dr. N. A. Baloch for his gracious guidance and encouragement,

- Mr. Imdad Hussaini for letting me have a photostat of his copy of the Sindhi work titled *'Dodo-Chanesar'*, published by the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, Islamabad, in March 1975,

- Agha Saleem for the timely gift of Dr. N. A. Baloch's exhaustive study on the subject

- Professor Dr. Naheed Nawaz of the Department of Sindhi, Karachi University, for loaning me Dr. N. A. Baloch's two-volume work titled *' Mashhoor Sindhi Qissa -- Sindh jo Rizmiya Daastaan—Dodo-Chanesar'*,

- Mr Shams Jafrani,former Secretary, Culture Department, Government of Sindh, for the complimentary copy of Dr. Ghulam Ali Allana's English book titled *'Sindhi Society and Culture'*,

- Professor Saleem Ahmed Memon, Director, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai Chair, Karachi University. for loaning me Dr. Ghulam Ali Allana's work titled 'Folk Music of Sind', and

- Mr. Shamsul Haq Memon, Consultant, Sindh Coastal Development Authority, for trusting me with his

laptop, without which this and a couple of earlier works would not have materialized.

Monday, February 13, 2011;
Rabi al-Awwal 09, 1432

-- **Saleem Noorhusain**

Fareeda Lodge,
A-104, Z-II, Gulshan-e-Maymar,
Gadap Town, Karachi-75340.

Postscript

Exactly fifty one days after this Note was composed Dr. N. A. Baloch passed away, aged almost 94. Some ten weeks earlier I had placed the script of this work before him at his residence in Qasimabad, Hyderabad, Sindh, and requested him to write a few words about it by way of Preface or Foreword. He had said that he would have liked to do so but for his infirm condition and greatly weakened eyesight. It had been a disappointment for he was a kind of specialist in the subject of Sindhi folklore and much of this work is sourced on the end products of his 26-year long research. I had then approached another luminary of language and letters in Sindh with the same request. I mean Joyo Sahib, who, like Comrade Sobho and Shaikh Hafeez, is also my intellectual guides.

I now venture to dedicate this humble work to.—

- Late Dr. N. A. Baloch (16.12.1917-06.04.2011 CE), by whose name should the 20th century world of scholarly research in Sindh be known; and

- Mr. Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo (b. 12.08. 1915 CE), Mr. Sobhraj Gianchandani (b. 03.05.1920 CE) and late Shaikh Hafeez (10.12.1931-09.11.1971) the three brightest stars of enlightenment on the firmament of Sindh; may the living remain shining for many years to come.

The bold expressions of individuality and creativity by these four leaders of thought are geared to secure the future of imagination, and they, to borrow the words of Karen Armstrong, do not 'denigrate myth as useless, false and outmoded'.--- SNh

[Thursday; April 07, 2011/Jamadi al Awwal 03, 1432 HE.]

PREFACE

Epics provide source material of interest of heroic deeds of a people who have a historic past. These essentially are part of folklore of peoples who lay claim to folk memory, a body of recollections or legends that persists among them. Sindhi, the national language of the people of Sindh, holds a nexus of folk literature as ancient and steadfast, as magnificent and original as any such benedictory heritage of the kind which any people the world over may feel proud to possess. Such a folklore, their folk narration in general, represents essence of their experience and achievement in history. The lasting and the most marvelous repository of that essence is of course their language – for, it is in the telling and re-telling, in the speaking and the hearing, that the accumulated essence is extrapolated and further expanded, and the meaning and truth of it grows and is refined, while the people's imagination and awareness of self-existence in the "Cosmos" of their land as their home, register continuity and rise in time.

Folk narration, particularly of the folklore, has a divisiveness of forms, shapes and sizes, all having, of course, a "hero" or a "life-situation" reaching out venturesomely, yet almost always without fail, towards an achievement or the resolution of the situation. Here again, it is the language which acts as bearer and propellant *par-excellence* of life's urge to comprehend and evolve-the language which is the primeval tool of communication and understanding, fashioned by man from infantile blinking of the eye, guttural ejaculations and incoherent utterances to "logos", the "word", or "words", about which all scriptures, and all the science, almost in unison, say: "in the word was life, and the life was the light of

men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not [since] overcome it".

The folklore compassing, among other genres, the EPIC with all its glory, "recall a memory", often fantastic, a myth, a legend, the *nouvelle* merging at last in a flood of the great classics, oral and literary, the marvelous store-houses of human experience, is indeed the carrier, through endless generations, of the primal light, the light of discernment and achievement, held alive by the first sensible word, which was there "In the beginning and the Word was God and the Word was with God, all things were made through the Word and without the word was not anything made that was made".

In one of such a royal language and in such a high nexus of its folklore, memorized and recited for centuries, the Sindhian world holds one of its epics, known through time and ever remembered, "The Epic of Dodo-Chanesar". Our dearest and highly esteemed friend and literary colleague, Saleem Noorhusain, has translated this Sindhi epic into English. It is indeed a Homeric task that he undertook and has so ably completed it. The world of Sindhi letters feels elated and offers him its word of thanks on such a singular piece of yeoman service to it.

Muhammad Ibrahim Joyo

Hyderabad Sindh,
February 08., 2011/
Rabi al-Awwal 04, 1432

INTRODUCTION

"An epic may deal with such various subjects as myths, heroic legends, histories, edifying religious tales, animal stories, or philosophical or moral theories. Epic poetry has been used by peoples all over the world and in different ages to transmit their traditions from one generation to another, without the aid of writing. These traditions frequently consist of legendary narratives about the glorious deeds of their national heroes. Thus scholars have often identified 'epic' with a certain kind of heroic age, which comes into existence in so-called heroic ages. Such ages have been experienced by many nations, usually at a stage of development in which they have had to struggle for a national identity. This effort, combined with such other conditions as an adequate material culture and a sufficiently productive economy, tend to produce a society dominated by a powerful and war-like nobility, constantly occupied with martial activities, whose individual members seek, above all, everlasting fame for themselves and for their lineages ... In its scope, the epic ranges freely and with authority over the natural and human order, over history and legend, and even over the fantastic and supernatural worlds."

The Epic of Dodo-Chanesar is a seven to eight centuries old story of extreme courage narrated ever since to describe the glorious deeds of heroes belonging to different Sindhi communities and to transmit Sindhi peoples' traditions of honour, integrity, sacrifice, decency and fellow feeling from generation to generation. It can also be identified with a heroic age, which was experienced by the Sindhi society while struggling for a national identity at a stage of its development when it was dominated by such powerful and war-like nobles as,

inter alia, Dodo and Chanesar from the Soomro tribe, Abro and Bhallo from the Sammo tribe, and Jakhhro from the Jarejo tribe, who earned everlasting fame for their own selves as well as their lineages. The Sindhi peoples' struggle for national identity at this juncture of their history is instanced by the fights put up by all, big and small, high and low, to thwart the advance of the invading army so much so that its commander had to exclaim in exasperation: *"It's as though pathways are fighting*!"

The above is a bird's eye-view. Let us have a panoramic look through the eyes of Dr. N. A. Baloch, the doyen of the research scholars of Sindh. He has published two works on the subject in Sindhi. One is a monumental 2-volume compilation of all the versions of this Epic which he collected in the course of his research over a quarter century (1950-76) and which is titled *'Mashhoor Sindhi Qissa: Sindh jo Rizmiya Daastaan: Dodo-Chanesar'* (*Famous Sindhi Tales: A War Epic of Sindh: Dodo-Chanesar*) The second volume of this work carries his *'Preface'* dated 15.12.1977 in English. His other work is an exhaustive study, titled *'Soomran jo Daur --- Doday-Chanesar ji Galh aen bay Ravaeti Zakhiray ji Roshni-a mein'* (*The Soomro Period in the Light of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar and other Traditional Treasure-Trove).* Both works were published by the Sindhi Adabi Board, Jamshoro (Sindh), the first in 1976-77 and the second in September 1980. What follows is either excerpted from or sourced on one or the other of these works, the first of which is referred to as *'Preface'* and the second as *'Study'*. The former (i.e., *Preface*) judges both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar and regards it as "one of the greatest in world literature." The latter (i.e., *Study*) views the Tale "as unique and unequalled in its originality, style and popularity."

The Great Fight

In *'Study'*, Dr. Baloch cites a traditional belief in Sindh to the effect that there have been two and half Qalandars in the world, likewise there have been two and half great fights

in the world:

As were two and half Qalandars in the world,
So are two and half fights in the world.

"Of these great fights one is that of the Imams (on the battlefield of Karbala in 680 CE between the forces of the Ummayad Caliph Yazid and the Holy Prophet's [saw] grandson Imam Husain[AS] ibn Ali[AS] and his small band of supporters), one is that of Dodo-Chanesar, and the remaining half is shared by the whole world".*

"Some tales and stories from ancient times grew in size and scope through oral traditions and additions therein over the centuries. Some of these stories were developed into great fables on the basis of faith, while some others were turned into great war-epics. The spirit behind the constant rehashing and enrichment of the accounts and narrations of some obliterated landmarks, semi-historical or historical episodes of the tales and stories is to motivate the people to eulogize their homeland heroes and braves for their nobility, magnanimity and prowess, to instill in themselves the spirit of patriotism; and to revisit and brighten their abiding cultural heritage.

Salient Features of the Tale

"Examples from different nations and languages of the world show that the more prominent features in the corpus of an epic are four at the least: Historical or semi-historical origin of the story, chain of principal traditions, fantastic narrations of the feats of ones' heroes, and the spirit of national superiority and patriotism. Prominent presence of these features in the Epic of Dodo-Chanesar place it alongside greatest epics of the world.

"One, among the war stories prevalent in different

*"Another tradition narrated by sughar (professional bard), Haji Naahar Chaang, in a gathering on 19.12.1864 during the Shah Qadri Fair has it: 'As God Almighty held the store of fights in His hand, the soul of Imam Sahib approached Him first and was given one-half of the store, then came the soul of Dodo and received one-fourth, the remaining one-fourth was apportioned among rest of the world souls."

countries and languages, very few have their roots in history or semi-history. For example, the *Shahnama* by Firdousi is a voluminous chronicle of war stories in which versified tales of not only ancient historical periods are fictitious accounts but those of late historical (Sassanid) period also read like semi-historical fiction. Compared to it, the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar is more than a legend as it is connected with a historical period of Sindh and India.....

"Two, the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar is a fine example of the continuum of an oral tradition down the ages. It is not a poetic composition of a particular poet or a versifier like some other epics, but it arose in antiquity like a folktale and became popular in every nook and corner of the country. Thereafter, it was orally narrated by narrators in every age. *Sughars* (skilled narrators) and poets adorned it in the joint setting of 'prose and poetry'. Skilled tale-tellers sung and narrated it. And people heard it with keen interest and entertained themselves.....

"Three, in the world-renowned war stories and epics of this type the characters and exploits of the heroes are made luminous through fictional hyperbole and fantastic exaggeration because folk mentality is quickly and more deeply impressed by extraordinary feats and miracles..... Fictional hyperbole and super description are traditional and psychological elements of war stories and epics by means of which the character of heroes is illustrated. The narration of miracles is not meant to waste the real persona of the hero. Attribution of supernatural acts to heroes magnifies their awe, dignity and strength tenfold, and thus serves the traditional purpose of the epic. Despite such attribution, the real persona of the braves remains intact.

"In order to brighten their characters at the folk level, the braves in this Tale of Dodo-Chanesar are also depicted, in line with demands of epic, as having performed astonishing feats or having witnessed or benefitted from miracles. Such feats include: The Soomros' great ancestor alias

'*Waachro*' (Windblown) is flown in by the wind; elder Dodo watches a cutlass killing a serpent all by itself; Dodo picks up the cutlass and strikes it on river water which bisects itself to let him pass; elder Dodo as well as Chanesar talk with a lion when wrestling it; the lion and the lioness talk with each other; dogs talk; birds say that Chanesar would succeed if he snaps a stick from this tree; when Nangar and Mungar go in to battle, their horses shed tears; horses of Chanesar as well as Nangar and Muhammad talk; the mare of Dodo and the horse of Muhammad can fly; and so on so forth. Extraordinary feats of the heroes include: Elder Dodo kills a demon and then a demonic bird; Chanesar kills a lion, captures a wild ass, and kills a cannibal and a berserk camel; in Delhi, Chanesar first kills a demon and then a wild elephant of the king.

"Four, like other great tales of the world, this Tale is also replete with the spirit of national superiority and patriotism". (Here are some instances of verse lines sung in the course of narration of the Tale.—Tr. :)

> *"May Sindh ever prosper, the land of comfort n' ease*
> *May Sindh ever prosper, where saints congregate*
> *May Sindh of Shahbaz[1] prosper, whose religious guides n' mendicants are manifest*
> *Praise be to Dodoians, let the whole world hear*
> *Soomros'll celebrate Sindh as long as they breathe*
> *The fortress of Wigah[2], may it never be derelict,*
> *Blessed be the mother, who's given birth to Dodo*
> *May the Soomros, known for bravery, ever reign over Wigah*
> *Brave Nangar Soomro's nape is as strong as a forest lion's*
> *Brave Soomros of Sindh are fighting the enemy*
> *O True Lord, let the Soomros be victorious"*

[[1] Togetherwith the prefix of 'Qalandar' popular title of the famous saint Hazrat Usman al-Marandi/Marwandi (538 AH/1143 CE-650 AH/1252 CE), whose mausoleum in Sehwan (Sindh) is a place of pilgrimage.
[2] As some traditions of the Tale have it: The capital of the Soomro kingdom. —Tr.]

"Antiquity of the Tale

"The Tale of Dodo-Chanesar, which was prevalent in the late age and is prevalent even now in Sindh and its

adjoining areas (Kutch, Jesalmir, Baaharmir, Rahimyaar Khan, Bhaagnari and Sibi), is the same in its basic structure and events ever though its various versions differ in respect of some events and locales. As to when did it get into this structure or form is not certain. However, since when it, having become popular, came to be sung can be surmised by cogitating over the dates of its various traditions", which beginning with the second half of 17th century go right up to the 20th century of the Common Era (or CE, which is a substitute for Anno Domini or AD . - tr.). Such cogitation leads one to the conclusion that "the tale of Dodo-Chanesar currently in vogue has been popular since the second half of the 17th century CE and is being sung since 18th century CE to the present time."

This Epic, 'Preface' supplements, "originated in the Sumara Period of the History of Sind (Circa 1050-1350 AD) and has been transmitted to us in oral tradition. It has been composed, sung and narrated artistically by the country bards all over the country in its different versions and with all the additions and alterations in order to glorify the heroes in accordance with the taste of the time during the past many centuries. The tradition continues on to this day and the 'STORY OF DODO-CNANESAR' is being artistically narrated and sung by both the professional minstrels and others in the nights-long folk assemblies in almost every part of the country. Some brilliant groups of narrators have sung the epic for three or more consecutive nights holding the large assembly of the village folk in rapt attention.

"It is uninterrupted continuity of the oral tradition embellishing the Epic and its narration which makes it not only a significant contribution within the domain of folklore but also a valuable source of information on the historical and cultural aspects of the Sumara period. In absence of any contemporary record of the Sumara period, with the exception of a few passing references in some historical works, this Epic in its different dimensions becomes a valuable source of information to the historian to piece together a more valid account

of the political, social, cultural, economic and ethnological conditions in Sind during 12th to 14th centuries A.D.

"The nucleus of the Epic is represented by the following event:-

> "An aggrieved party from Sind (a brother or a minister of the ruling Sumara prince) seeks help of the Sultan (of Ghazna or Delhi) whose powerful armies invade Sind. Scores of battles are fought in which the defending heroes of the Sumara house and their allies fall one after another but fight it out to the finish wiping out the bulk of the invading army.

"These wars and the valour of the heroes constitute the main theme of the Epic. References of such an event having taken place are found in the Sind histories, such as *Tarikh-e-Ma'sumi* (1009 H/ 1600), *Tarikh-e-Tahiri* (1030 H/1621), and *Tunfat-al-Kiram* (1182 H/1768), though the names of the princes and the kings involved differ in different accounts."

Yet another renowned scholar of Sindh, late Prof. Mahram Khan Wighamal (18th July 1918-28th December 1992 CE), in his '*Muqaddamo*' dated 14th December 1973 to the Sindhi publication (March 1975) of the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, Islamabad, titled '*Dodo-Chanesar*', has this to say about the Soomros' emergence on the political stage.

"Since this tragic incident occurred during the reign of Soomro dynasty, let us have a look at the tribe's antecedents.

"Early History of Soomro Tribe

"After Harsh, the king of Thanesar (647 CE), a new nation emerged in Rajisthan known as Rajput. Soomros are also Rajputs of Rajisthan, who are believed to be an important

offshoot of its Permaar branch. Their early power bases were in Malva, Gujarat, Bekanir, Aabu, Ladaani and Dhutt. In his *History of India* (Volume I), Sir Henry Elliot has proved, with the endorsement of *Tarikh-e-Tahiri*, the ruling dynasty of Alore (Aror) to be Soomros. The rise of Soomros in Sindh during the Arab caliphate is attributable to certain political causes. The secret plot that began to be hatched to demolish the central caliphate in Damascus and Baghdad affected Sindh also. Here Ismailis* and Qarmatis* were always engaged in such plotting.

*"As a distant and inaccessible frontier province of the Arab Empire, Sindh acted as a refuge and home to the dissident, the persecuted, and the minority sects of Islam. The various movements later known as Ismaili had become active from the latter half of the third century AH or ninth century AD in widely scattered areas of the Muslim world. Hamdan Qarmat emerged as an Ismaili around 260/873 and built up a vigorous movement in the southern region of Iraq. An Ismaili centre was established in Yemen by his well known *dai* (missionary) Abu al-Qasim bin Hawshab Mansur al-Yemen, around the year 270/883 (Poonawala 1977; 34). He dispatched his nephew al-Haytham as *dai* to Sindh. This was followed by schism in about 286/899, when Mansur al-Yemen declared his loyalty to the Fatmid Ubayd Allah al-Mahdi. The Ismaili followers of Hamdan Qarmat, who were known as Qaramita (also Carmathians), invaded Mecca in 319/931, slaughtered the pilgrims and carried away the sacred Black Stone from the holy Ka'aba (Ibn Khaldun, Vol IV; 960). After their defeat, they moved into Sindh, followed by Ismailis who had conquered Egypt in AD 969 and were known as the Fatmids. Both the Qaramitas and the Fatmids believed that the line of Imams from the house of the Prophet (PBUH) ended with Ismail; hence they are also known as Ismailis. The Ismailis had complete sway over Sindh by the end of tenth century, because the local Arab tribes who had rebelled against the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad considered it prudent to forge links with the rival Fatmid caliphs of Egypt. Further, the capture of Egypt and Syria in AD 969 by the Fatmids had led to a shift of Indian trade from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea. As a vital communication link in the Indian trade, Sindh was bound to come under Ismaili influence.

"A certain unnamed *dai* active in Multan from around 330/941, succeeded in converting one of the princes and a large number of non-Muslims. He was however accused at the court of the Fatmid caliph al-Muiz (341-65/953-75) of incompletely Ismailizing the converts from Hinduism, because he had permitted them to retain certain indigenous Hindu practices in matrimonial and dietary laws. The Fatmid caliph, al-Aziz (AD 975-96), sent Jalam (Halam or Halim) ibn Shayban with a military escort to replace him. This he did by conquering Multan in 372/983, destroying the sun temple, and transforming it into a mosque.... The Ismaili governor of Multan at the time of the Ghaznavids was Abu al-Fath Luayy (Lodi), and the Ismaili kingdom of Multan extended from the upper Indus Valley to Al-Rur in Sindh.... Sultan Mahmud, who had succeeded his father Subuk-Tigin in 387/988, had already earned the gratitude of the orthodox Muslims and the title of Yamin al-Dawla (Right Hand of the State) from the Abbasid caliph by waging pious war against the Ismailis in Khurasan and the Hindus in Afghanistan. He now pursued the same policy in the area which is now Pakistan and India." (Suhail Zaheer Lari, '*An Illustrated History of Sindh*', 2002, pp.66-88.—Tr.)

They created a volatile situation in cahoots with the native Hindu Soomros. Thus in the days of Caliph Hashaam, when Tamim bin Zaid Utbi was the administrator of Sindh, the Nazaris revolted in Alore (Aror). The disorder and turmoil forced Tamim Utbi to abandon the city. Dalurai, the chief of the Soomros, was appointed the first administrator of the abandoned city. This incident happened approximately in 733 CE. In those days there were two separate seats, Multan and Mansurah, of the Arab rule in Sindh. Alore was an important city on the border between the two power bastions.

"During the reign (997-1030 CE) of Sultan Mehmood Ghaznavi, Dawood bin Nasee: bin Hameed Shaikh, the last ruler of Multan, belonged to the Ismaili-Qarmati sect and in Mansurah someone probably belonging to the family of Umar bin Abdul Aziz Habari, had perhaps survived as the last Arab ruler. Sultan Mehmood had the ruler of Multan killed for his alleged apostasy. But when he reached Mansoorah in Sindh on his way back from Somnath (1025 CE), its ruler made himself scarce.

"Soomro Rule in Sindh

"The Soomro rule over Sindh, in the real sense, began long after Sultan Mehmood, when the ninth emperor of the Ghaznavid Empire, Sultan Abdul Rasheed (r. 1051-1053 CE) became negligent of administering Sindh. Humbar (d. 1055 CE), son of Dalurai II, began to designate himself as the sovereign ruler of Sindh. Up to that time due to political and social expediencies, the Soomros had adopted the Ismaili faith as their religious persuasion. But later, by the grace of Ghaus Bahauddin Zakaria (1170-1267 CE) of Multan, they adopted the central faith of the Islamic Shariah, and, as a result, many clans of the ruling tribe came to believe in the truth and veracity of Islam. The miracle by Ghaus the Pious of producing water to drink for the thirsty marriage procession of Soomros that had lost its way in a desert is also famous in this context. Now, therefore, in every difficulty, every lean patch, and, in the

words of Bhaago Bhaan, 'at every formidable front, they, again and again,

Raise slogan of Ghaus Bahauddin,
Night has passed, day has broken, star has risen.'

"Capitals of Soomros in Sindh

"The early habitations of Soomros have already been mentioned. A look at the history of their reign over Sindh reveals that their capitals underwent many shifts. They never had one permanent capital. After quitting Alore and Brahmanabad, they came to settle for Tharri. Mohammed Soomro (1251-1256 CE) made Mahatam Toor (Mohammed Toor) his capital. In the 13th century of the Common Era, the Soomro seat of power came to be established in the famous fortress of Wigahkot on the frontier between Kutch and Sindh. In the nearby village of Kaunar Sar, which had earlier been a settlement of Gujjars, they constructed their palaces and mansions. This place came to be known as Roopah Maari. Their families lived there. It was this capital defending which Dodo Rai the Brave had embraced martyrdom at the hands of Afghan forces of Alauddin in 1300 CE (according to some, in 1313 CE). It, however, was not the end of capital-shifts. Soon after this war (in the 14th century CE) Soomros resettled in Umarkot, where Umar Soomro, the abductor of Marui, reigned from 1365 to 1390 CE. He was followed by Bhoongar III (1390-1400 CE) and Hameer (1400-1440 CE). The latter was married to the sister of Raano or Mendhro of the semi-historical folktale Moomal-Raano. He was the last Soomro king, who ruled from Umarkot. But wars between Murand Soomros of Dhutt and Mahmood Begri up to 1471 CE are a proven historical fact. Similarly, one finds mention of some other Soomro families and their seats of power in history.

"It seems rather difficult to build a continuous chronicle on the basis of this loose account of the Soomro rule in Sindh. The reason for this difficulty seems to be that several families of this ruling dynasty established and shifted their

rules within their separate spheres of influence at different times. It is also possible that more than one Soomro rulers might have ruled adjacent realms at the same time!

"Dodoian Family

"History contains different views and traditions about how and when the reign of the Soomros' Wigahkot branch over Kutch was established. Some Hindu historians have written that Roopo and Wego were two Soomro brothers, who founded the Roopah Maari and Wigahkot. But this appears to be presumptive because, according to well known traditions and chronicles, the name of Bhoongar Rai's queen was 'Roopa', the name of whose palace 'Roopah Maari' (*Roopa Mansion*) came to be applied to its locale also. Bhaago Bhaan has repeatedly described this branch of the Soomros as family of Dodo:

> *Rulers of Wigahkot are family members of Dodo,*
> *Who were only heard of with ears are now seen with eyes.*

"It is possible that this ascription may be to Dodo I, who was a very well known brave and strong person. Dodo II and Dodo III were certainly of this family. It seems that the whole valiance and intrepidity of the Soomros came to be concentrated in this family.

"Account of this family generally begins with Bhoongar Rai. Dodo II, who was commonly called 'Nahro' (i.e., solid) Dodo, was the only son of Boongar Rai. He had married twice. His first wife was from a Gujar family of Lohan village, who were ironsmiths. She gave birth first to Baaghi and then to Chanesar. His second wife was from his own family on the patriarchal side. While she was still bearing his child, Nahro Dodo died fighting the Gujar and Tomaar (Tanwar) tribes. His pregnant widow soon after gave birth to a son, who was named 'Dodo' by his grandfather so as to preserve the memory of his slain son. It is he, who is known as Dodo III and is the protagonist of this epic. (Naming a son after his father was

probably prevalent among high level families in those days. For instance, the Sammo chieftain, Jaam Unar, was son of Unar; hence he is called 'Unarai' i.e. *Unarian*). Bhaago Bhaan has also stated this strange fact in his verses:

Dodo n' Chanesar are both sons of Dodo,
These grandsons of Bhoongar indulge in joyful games."

The chapter captioned 'The Sumras' (pp. 65-80) in '*An Illustrated History of Sindh*' is excerpted hereunder by way of contradistinction.

"The Sumras claim descent from the Arabs of Samarra, who arrived in Sindh with the members of the Tamim tribe who served as Abbasid governors in Sindh, and had been sent to Sindh with a number of other tribes to curb the opposition to Abbasid rule among the Arab tribes settled in Sindh and Baluchistan. The opposition was contained but could not be eliminated, and ultimately led to a number of Arab tribes and native chiefs seizing power in different parts of Sindh in latter half of the ninth century, and setting up independent kingdoms of their own. The Sumras also took possession of parts of Sindh on the left bank of the Indus River from which they expelled the Sammas, who took refuge in Kutch. The first ruler of the Sumra tribe is believed to have been Khafif I who took over Mansurah after the last ruler of Banu Habbar died in c. AD 1010.

"Despite repeated punishment meted out to the intransigent Ismailis, Sultan Mahmud was not able to root out Ismailism, which dispersed and found sanctuary in Mansurah. Sultan Mahmud invaded Mansurah on his way back from the plunder of the great seaport of Somnath in 416/1025.....The next winter Sultan Mahmud equipped a flotilla and came down the river Indus to destroy the Ismaili trade, and dismantle Jat settlements along the river. He came with 1400 specially built boats, which had steel spears and knives attached to the front and sides and were equipped with flame throwing gear. He

destroyed the Ismaili navy which consisted of over 4000 ordinary boats commonly used for transport and trade. The Sumra chief Khafif I was drowned. Those who escaped to the shore were hunted and killed by Sultan's cavalry. When Sultan Mahmud died in 420/1030, Farrukhi wrote in an elegy,

> *"Alas and alack, the Karamatian (Ismailis) can now rejoice,*
> *They will be secure against death by stoning on the gallows.*

"The Sumras assembled at Thari in Matli Taluka in c. AD 1026, away from the main urban centres, and elected Sumar as their leader", who died in c. AD 1055 and was succeeded by his son, Bhungar I, who died in c. AD 1068 and was succeeded by Dodo I, who was succeeded by his sister, Tari, in c. AD 1092, who abdicated in c. AD 1098 in favour of her brother, Sanghar, who was succeeded in c. AD 1106 by his brother-in-law, Khafif II, who died in c. AD 1141 and was succeeded by Umar I, upon whose death in c. AD 1180 Dodo II took over. During his rule "Shihab al-Din Suri (also called Muiz al-Din Muhammad bin Sam) ..... delivered Multan from the hands of the Ismailis in 571/1175-6 and reduced Upper Sindh..... He attacked Debal in the south in 578/1182 and captured the area along the coast of Sindh and Makran to end the Ismaili monopoly of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean." Dodo II died in c. AD 1194 and was succeeded by Bhungar II, whose successors were Chanesar I and Gunero I, their years of ascension to the throne being indeterminate. The former is said to have escaped in a boat, when Debal was "attacked and occupied" by "Jalal al-Din Mengobirdi (Mingbarni, Mingirni), the heir to the throne of Khwarizm Shah", who "left Sindh by way of Makran late in 620/1223, but the Mongols repeatedly attacked Sindh for the next one hundred years. After Jalal al-Din left, Qubacha once again occupied parts of Punjab and Sindh..... When the course of the river Indus changed westward, the Sumras shifted their capital in c. 639/1241 from Thari to Muhammad Tur in Talka Bathoro, on the Gunghro branch of the river Indus. The capital was named after the Sumra chief of that name who ruled from c. AD 1242

to 1254..... Muhammad Tur was succeeded by Gunero II (c. AD 1254-1258), followed by Duda (ie., Dodo) III (c. AD 1258-1273), and Tai (c. AD 1273-1283)..... During the reign of Chanesar II (c. AD 1283-1300), Ala al Din Khalji, Sultan of Delhi from AD 1296 to 1316, sent his army into Sindh in 697/1297 to evict the Mongols who had occupied Sehwan. The Delhi army also invaded lower Sindh and Kutch, and adjudicated between two warring factions of the Sumras. This gave birth to the ballads or folk lyrics of Dodo-Chanesar which, if genuine, contain the oldest extant verses in Sindhi language. (Ajwani, 1984; 25). The river Indus once again changed its course in c. AD 1317-1320, forcing the Sumras to shift their capital from Muhammad Tur to Samoi. Debal was deserted and a new port called Lahri Bundar was established on the Kalri branch of the river Indus. Bhungar III (c. AD 1300-1315) was succeeded by his son Khafif III", who died in c. AD 1332 to be succeeded by his brother Dodo IV, who was "followed by Umer II and Bhungar IV in quick succession. The last ruler was Hamir, who was overthrown by the Sammas in 752/1352.

"Historians do not agree regarding the names of the period of Sumra rule over Sindh." The names of Sumra chiefs with their periods mentioned hereinabove appear to have been taken by Lari, the author of the above cited history, from chronicles other than those of H. M. Elliot & J. Dawson's *The History of Sindh as told by its own Historians* and Mir Masum's *Tarikh-e-Masumi*. The names as listed by Lari from these two (21 for Elliot and 09 for Masum) are (read Dodo for Duda):

Elliot: Sumra, Bhungar, Duda I, Tari, Sanghar, Hafif I, Umar I, Duda II, Pahtu, Genhara I, Muhammad Tur, Genhara II, Duda III, Tai, Chanesar, Bhungar II, Hafif II, Duda IV, Umar II, Bhungar III, and Hamir.

Masum: Sumra, Bhungar, Duda, Tari, Sanghar, Hamun, Pitthu, Khaira, and Armil.

The second part of Dr, Baloch's 'Study', captioned

'Galh mein Soomran aen sandan Daur baabat Taarikhi Ahmiyat waaro Mavaad' (Historically Important Material in the Tale about Soomros and their Times) comprises six chapters, which deal with all aspects of the subject including (a) Historical Background of Tale, (b) Genealogy of Soomros and their Rulers, (c) Political Sovereignty of Soomros, Frontiers of their Realm, and other Kingdoms, (d) Soomros' Wars with other Nations, (e) Selection of Rulers and Governance, and (f) Social and Cultural Conditions during Soomro Times. Since one of these six aspects, the one at (b), is more particularly germane to what has been reproduced above from Prof. Khan's 'Muqaddamo', it is highlighted hereunder.

> "No opinion can be formed about how and when the Tale originated. Whatever did happen in those remote times left behind vague and obscure remembrances on the basis of which different skilled narrators, versifiers and vocalists in different parts of Sindh described and sung it in their own various tongues, and in doing so they enlarged and developed the original contours of the event according to their own peculiar mindset and artistry. So, we can have just an idea of the historical, social and cultural conditions obtaining at the time from what is currently available in the form of oral traditions and written accounts." What follows is a sort of extract of all these sources.

Origin and Genealogy of Soomros

According to all the extant allusions and hints in various traditions of the Tale, Soomros are of Arab stock. Here is

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[*Prof. Dr. Ghulam Ali Allana in his book titled 'Sindhi Society and Culture' (May 2010, Culture Department, Government of Sindh, Karachi; pp 91-3] has highlighted the diversity of sociologists' opinions about the origin of Soomros. He opens his discussion with a quote from Dr. Baloch's book 'Sind: Historical Studies' (2003; Pakistan Study Center, Jamshoro, Sindh):

"In the second century Hijri during the Caliphate of Suleman bin Abdul Malik (715-717 AD), it was decreed that the Arabs in Sindh should settle n Sindh for ever. They made Sindh their permanent abode. These Arab settlers lost their separate identity in the course of the next two centuries through inter marriages with Sindhis, ▸▸

what is said about their Arab origin*.

1. They are direct descendants of Hazrat Ali[AS].
2. They are progeny of a boy named Soomar, who was

▸▸ and in the fourth century AH we find that the Arab rulers of local government in various parts of Sindh were either the sons or the sons-in-law of the Sindhi Muslims. Soomras were descendants of these hybrid princes, whose ancestors, according to a common legend, were either Arabs or their grandsons on mother's side." According to Dr. Allana, Dr. Baloch, in an article published in 1975, "had stated that Soomras are originally Hindu Rajputs." Dr. Allana cites six other authors/works (Mir Tahir Nisyani's *Tarikh-e-Tahiri*, *Tarikh-e-Waqai Rajistan*, Maulai Shaidai's *Tarikh-e-Tamadun-e-Sindh*, Sayd Suleman Nadvi's *Arab-wa-Hind*, Abu Zafar Nadvi's *Tarikh-e-Sindh*, and M. H. Pahnwar's *Chronological History of Sindh*) as having held that Soomros were originally Hindu Rajputs, who had accepted Islam soon after the Arab invasion of Sindh. In the opinion of M. H. Pahnwar, "The Sindh historians are also largely unreliable on the Soomra perid of the history of Sindh. All of them (histories of Sindh) were written in the 17th century except Tuhfatul Kiram which was written in the 18th century AD. Their information is based on hearsay and folklore rather than on any earlier writings."

Even though Dr. Abdul Haq Soomro, as quoted by Dr. Allana, is not very clear about his community's origin, a passage in his book '*The Soomras*' reads: "The Soomras remained Buddhists all the time, and this offended the Brahmans. Then, on the advent of Islam, they (the Soomras) joined the Ismaili sect, and this offended the other sects...." In the opinion of Prof. Dr. Allana himself (pp. 375 of op. cit.), Soomros "are aboriginal people of Indus valley. They were Hindu Rajputs and accepted Islam under the hands of Isma'ili da'i in the 9th century AD". – Tr.]

[Note: If one were inclined to reconcile by manipulation the above four traditions with each other and fit them into the main events of the tale as listed in 'Preface' and 'Muqaddamo' as well as what is written in 'An Illustrated History of Sindh', the resultant genealogical order from generation to generation of elders, chiefs or rulers (each following its predecessor by roughly 32 years up to Bhoongar I) would emerge as under. It would, of course, be arbitrary.

Soomar; 680 CE, the year of the targedy of Karbala > (unknown; 712) > (unknown; 744) > (unknown; 776) > (unknown; 808> Waachher; 840 >(Unknown; 872) > (Unknown; 904) > (Unknown; 936) > Dodo I; 968 > Bhoongar I; 1000 > Khafif I; 1025, the year he died by drowning during Sultan Memood's attack > Soomar II; 1026, the year of his election as Chief > Bhoongar II;1055 > Dodo II; 1068 > Tari; 1092 > Sanghar; 1098 > Khafif II; 1106 > Umar I; 1141 > Dodo III; 1180 > Bhoongar III; 1194 > Chanesar I; ? > Gunero I; ? > Muhammad Toor; 1244 > Gnero II 1254 > Dodo IV; 1258 > Tai 1273 >Chanesar II; 1283 > Bhoongar IV; 1300 (Black or Solid Dodo V is the one who, according to traditions, after fathering Baaghi and Chanesar from his ironsmith wife and Dodo from his princess or full blooded wife, predeceased his own father) > Khafif III; 1315 > Dodo VI; 1332 > Umar II; ? > Bhoongar V; ? > Hameer, the last Soomro ruler whom the sammos replaced in 1352.

Alauddin Khilji's reign from 1296 to 1316 was nearly the same as that of Bhoongar IV (1300-1315). If the fight between Khalji and Soomro armies did actually take place, the whole drama had barely one year after the death of Bhoongar in 1315 to Alauddin's dethronement in 1316 to be enacted in those days of poor logistics. —Tr.]

the last survivor of his tribe, which had fought in the battle at Karbala on the side of Imam Husain[AS].

3. Their first great grand father was born at Makkah into an Arab family, may be that of Hazrat Ali[AS]. He later came to Sindh, where he grew up. He was called by the alias 'Waachhro' (Titpullar) because he sucked at his mother's teats for milk so strongly as to pull them off. Hence, he was shifted to suckle buffalo teats. Another tradition has him flown into Sindh by winds and hence called by the alias 'Waachro' (Windblown). One of his progeny was Kaaro or Nahro (black or solid) Dodo, who fathered Bhoongar.

4. Some other traditions have it that Black or Solid Dodo was son of Bhoongar's wife 'Lail', who was daughter of a giant named 'Succer'. Both of these names, Lail and Succer, are Arabic, hence Black Dodo was an Arab. It was he who was wind flown into Sindh. Being a giant's grandson, his fabulous physique and strength enabled him to kill a demon in the realm of Dalurai, The king, on hearing of the feat and wanting to test his strength, had him disengage two elephants locked in combat with each other by prodding of king's men. Dalurai was so impressed that he gave his daughter in marriage alongwith half of his kindom with its throne at Wigahkot as dowry to the powerful young man, who also took an ironsmith family's girl as his wife. In view of the immutable tribal tradition of not marrying daughters outside the tribe, it can be concluded that king Dalurai and young Dodo are most likely to have belonged to the same tribe if not the same clan of that tribe.

Topography of Main Events

In his 'Preface', Dr. Baloch delineates topograpghy of the main events of the Tale as follows.

"The 'Epic of Dodo-Chanesar', as it is obtained in its

different versions today, has been artistically narrated at least since the 17th century. Its earliest versions have not come down to us. In its current form, the topography of the main events stands as follows, though its different versions differ in details.

"1. The elderly Sumara ruler, Bhungar, died in his capital, Wigah Kot. His brave son Dodo had died earlier after defeating the invading Gujjars.

"2. The courtiers and the community chiefs met in an Assembly to decide the question of succession. Of the two sons of Dodo (the elder), Chanesar and Dodo, they preferred the younger Dodo, who was brave and of pure blood, to Chanesar, who was from an alien mother who had influence over him. This was a decision against the accepted custom that the elder son would succeed his father.

"3. Being aggrieved, Chanesar sought support from Sultan Alauddin of Delhi and succeeded in bringing the Sultan with his powerful armies to Sindh

"4. On the way, different communities engaged the invading forces in battles but they were vanquished"

"5. Then, the princes of the Sumara house took the field. Chanesar's son Nangar and Dodo's son Bhungar (or Mungar) fought a series of battles over a long period of time. When they fell, Chanesar's elder son Mohammad and his friend Assio or Hasso brought in their fresh forces. When they also died on the battle field, Dodo prepared himself for the war. He mustered force from all over the country, fought fierce battles, and proved to be invincible. Losing a major portion of his armies, the Sultan wanted to withdraw but Chanesar contrived to lay the trap whereby the mare of Dodo was caught in a snare and Dodo was killed.

"6. Now Chanesar led the Sultan to the Wigah Kot. He had promised his sister Baghi's hand to the Sultan and the royal

marriage was to take place after Chanesar was 'turbaned' as the ruler of Sind. This, however, did not materialize. Before going to war, Dodo had sent his women folk under the leadership of his sister Baghi to Abro, the powerful Samma ruler of Kutch. When Chanesar entered, he found the houses all empty.

"7. Then, Chanesar persuaded the Sultan to invade Kutch. This was a long trail through barren lands. On the way, the local chiefs attacked the invading army. The royal forces were already reduced in strength, and after some fierce battles the Sultan offered peace to Abro Sammo on condition that he would hand over the Sumara ladies who had taken refuge with him. Abro had a blunt reply; 'he would prefer to die than betray the trust reposed in him.' At this crucial hour the Jarejas of Kutch (a sub-stock of the Sammas) with whom Abro was at war, also joined hands with him. Abro Sammo and the Jareja chief then fought bravely and died on the battle field.

"8. Prior to that, Baghi and the other Sumra women had slipped out towards the nearby mountains where they entered a cave which closed up at the entrance and, thus, those who had pursued them returned disappointed.

"9. The Sultan was preparing to leave, when the Bher (War Drum) resounded with the beat. On inquiry, the Sultan was informed that Abro Sammo's son was now preparing to give him the battle. Having been left with a nominal force, the Sultan gave his word that he would confirm the young Chief in power if he appeared before him. He came but he was just a baby. The Sultan said he would keep his word all the same. Finding that all was lost and he got nothing from the Sultan, Chanesar attacked remnants of the royal force, and when he fell the Sultan was left with his eight chiefs only.

"10. The Sultan and his companions, the nine of them, were now back on their long journey. When they reached Mirpur Mathelo (in the present district Sukkur in Sind) they halted

along side a well to rest and water their horses. The women folk who were there to fetch water pitied them and said to one another: 'This is what has happened to the Sultan who had come with his powerful armies! Now, how would he present himself in Delhi in such a forlorn and frustrated condition!!' The Sultan realised. He produced nine pills, put one pill (gori) on his own palm and on palm of each one of his chiefs, and when he uttered the code word '*Hoo*', they all swallowed the nine pills (*Nav gori*=9 pills) and died. They were buried with all reverence and their mausoleum which stands there is known to this day as that of 'Naval Gori Pir'".*

Prof. Mahram Khan's version of the topography of the main events of the Epic, as stated in his above cited '*Muqaddmo*', is somewhat different.

"Bhoongar Rai lived to a very old age. He brought up his brave grandsons, had them marry and saw their children. But as he closed his eyes in death, misfortune struck his dynasts in the shape of Alauddin Khilji.

"Causes of War

"The rightful successors to Bhoongar Rai's throne were Baaghi and then her brother Chanesar. Dodo was the youngest. A couple of days after Bhoongar's death, it was decided by the men in the family to hold the traditional turban -tying ceremony (equivalent of coronation), for which invitations were issued by Dodo Rai ('*Dodo Rai sent out letters of invitation for the fateful assembly* '). Soomros from Baharmir, Chauhans from Ajmer, Bhattis from Jaisalmir, Rajars from Maathelo, Sodhos from Dhutt, Sammos and Jarejos from Kutch Bhuj, and Channos from Kaachho assembled to participate in the ceremony. All of them unanimously upheld Baaghi's right, but she withdrew in favour of Chanesar. Bhaago Bhaan too

*"It has an indigenous architecture and appears to be a building of the Pre-Mughal period, but carries no inscription. It has a number of graves inside. 'Gori Pir' (= Ghuri Saint) would indicate that the Saint (Commander?) was from Ghur and might have died much earlier during the advent of the Ghuri Sultan Mohammad b. Sam."

endorsed this decision. Even though Dodo was the youngest, some of the participant nobles favoured Dodo because of his being the son of a full-blooded Soomro lady. Sensing the change in atmosphere Chanesar left the assembly pretending that he was going on a hunt to Bakaar *shikargah* (hunting preserve), which was near the Sindh border and some distance from which Alauddin Khilji's army was known to be camping in Kutch. At the insistence of Baaghi, Dodo persuaded Chanesar through Hyder Haalaani to return offering him the turban. Chanesar did return but the assembly did not welcome him properly. He became double minded and reasoned, 'When all are not agreed, how can Dodo offer me the turban on his own! I should better consult mother, who is my well-wisher greater than anyone else for she is the one who begot me into this world and reared me.' While he was gone to see his mother in the ladies' quarters, the assembly tied the turban around the head of Dodo. In the face of fait accompli, his mother could give Chanesar no better advice than:

> *"Now sell your horses n' get yourself a flock of sheep,*
> *While your sheep graze by Indus banks,*
> *You roam about with lambs on your shoulders,*
> *A red cane in hand, act weak n' frail, son,*
> *Then your mother will work for monthly wages in the court of Dodo.*

"'My dear son, these ponies and horses are now just a drain. Sell them off. For our livelihood, keep a flock of sheep and goats. This line agrees with your temperament also. We'll make a deal with Dodo Rai. Your mother will work for monthly wages in the court of Dodo. We'll live by selling butter milk, and won't die of hunger'.

This was like sprinkling salt on Chanesar's wounds. In his huff, he set out to seek the Indian emperor Alauddin Khilji's help. All this, having transpired in Wigahkot, is chronicled. But some of the incidents that are said to have happened between his setting out and return are just figments, such as crushing an ogre to death by embrace, splitting the brain of a lion with a

fist in the country of Abro Jaam, bisecting on the way a mad camel with one stroke of a stick, similarly bisecting a mad elephant in Delhi with the same stick, fisting a lion and a lioness to death in the Shahi Bagh (Royal Garden), killing with bare hands a demon who attacks Delhi, etc. These fictitious accounts turn this historical event into a semi-historical tale. (These hyperbolic feats might have been added by latter minstrels.) In short, military aid was approved for Chanesar on the recommendation of Namdar Nazar Baig and the military advisor Mandhan Rai (Madhu Rai) , and forces of Sultan Alauddin arrived to camp at Veerawah, which is close to the Gujarat-Kutch border in Nangarparkar subdivision of Tharpakar district.

"Military Adventures of Alauddin

"During the whole of his reign (1296-1316 CE) Sultan Alauddin remained engaged in wars on various fronts. Both of his high commanders, Alagh Khan and Nusrat Malik, were present in the wars in Kutch, Kathiawar and Gujarat. Apart from them, Tamar Baig, Nazar Baig Namdaar, Zafar Khan, Mohammed Khan Pathan and Mandhan Rai were also busy on these fronts. It was Alagh Khan, who, after Mehmood Ghaznavi, became the idol-breaker in the Somnath Temple of Kathiawar. Alauddin's second renowned general Nusrat Baig, on his part, conquered Gujarat. Mandhan Rai, who was originally the chief minister of Karan Waghelo, the king of Gujarat, betrayed (like Jam Juno of Sindh) his employer to join the Pathans and became military advisor of Alauddin. In these wars Kumari Kanwala was captured and taken to the Khilji camp, where she was married to Alauddin.

"In Hindi the flower *'Kanwal'* (lotus) is called *'Padmawat'*. Hence, a great poet of India, Malik Mohammed Jaisi, later (1540 CE) conferred the title of *'Padmani'* upon this very belle of Sagardeep in his famous poetic story titled *'Padmawat'*. Sidelining the historical facts and keeping in view the demands of fiction, the story is so constructed as to make the whole expedition aimed only at capture of Padmini.

"Battle Fronts of War with Soomros

"These historical facts are being presented in order to show where the Khilji army actually was at the time of the Wigahkot incident because it is generally thought that the army had arrived in Sindh from Delhi via Lahore and Multan and that the battle was fought at (Mirpur) Mathelo.

"There was no earthly reason for the Khilji army to take the said route for coming to Sindh for Alauddin's wars of conquest (in Gujarat, Kathiawar and Kutch from 1297 CE and onwards) were fought east and not north of Sindh. Since his army camp, where Alauddin married Kumari Kanwala during one of these expeditions, was also east of Sindh, the first battlefield could not have been Mathelo, which is situated in northern Sindh, but some place in eastern Sindh. That place, according to Bhaago Bhaan, was Veerawah. This assertion is lent credence by the fact that Alauddin had his covetous eyes on Wigahkot and his advisor Mandhan Rai had been urging his army at Kutch to advance with him, being a native of Sindh, as its guide. Chanesar's cry for help persuaded it to march on with Mandhan Rai guiding it to the *shikargah* (hunting ground) at Bakaar, where the disappointed Chanesar had gone ostensibly on a hunt. This *shikargah* should be deemed the same as the pasturage of Marui of Malir in the present Nangarparkar subdivision of Tharparkar, and hence identical with Veerawah.

"It is possible that the idea of seeking urgent military aid might have occurred to Chanesar due to the presence of the Khilji army close to Sindh frontier, and Dodo's urgent action of sending an emissary to have him return might have been aimed at forestalling any untoward incident. It is also possible that Chanesar's petition for aid might have been lodged initially at this camp, where General Namdar Nazar Baig and Advisor Mandhan Rai supported him vigorously and recommended his case strongly before the supreme commander. But supposing that Alauddin was not present in this camp but in the empire's capital, Delhi, Chanesar might have

gone there to have the royal stamp of approval for his so strongly recommended case.

"State and Result of War

"The royal forces were amassed at Veerawah and veterans like Tamar Baig, Malik Nusrat, Naamdaar Nazar Baig, Alagh Khan, Zafar Khan, Mohammed Khan, 'Hanmbas' Pathan, Mandhan and Chanesar were all present. To confront the royal forces the name of Chanesar's son Nangar Rai was proposed unanimously. Brave-heart community chiefs came with their stalwarts from all across Sindh to fight under his banner. They included Mohammed Khan and Sapar Soomro, Chhuto Jarejo, Sawai Samejo, Gahno Rajar, Haso Sodho, and many more. Bhaago Bhaan was also there as military advisor and political emissary.

"Bhaago Faqir tried to reach a settlement at first, which was about to materialize through Naamdaar Nazar Baig, when Mandhan Rai interposed to ask for the hand of Baaghi with the remark:

I'll come some day as groom's mate of Aladin,
N' pick the Soomri from amongst one n' quarter lakh.

"Even though Baaghi had already consented to any advisable match

"You nephew of Baaghi, keep your wits about you,
Give me away to the party that you think difficult,
If by giving me away comes relief, don't have your men killed.

But how could Nangar tolerate such a condition:

"I'll never give away the queen of Wigah even at the offer of realms.

"He gave a tit for tat to Aladin:

"Sitting in the assembly, intrepid Nangar speaks out,
'If you've a niece, marry her with my cousin Mungar,
Let one of your darling daughters in Delhi be my wife,

Or marry your sister to Dodo n' thus become each other's brothers-in-law'.

"There was no question of averting the battle now. War drums were sounded. Every new day Alauddin tried a new commander against Nangar Rai. On the first day he let loose his hunters. Then Baanko Barkhurdaar joined the battle along with his Negro troops. Hanbas Pathan came last. When he too was killed, Namdar Nazar Baig fielded the whole army. In the bloody battles that lasted for fifteen days, dare devil Nangar was martyred with all his brave-heart companions.

"The Pathans now marched on Wigahkot. Valiant Dodo Rai defended his capital resolutely. Swishing a sword in each of his two hands he fought on and on till the enemy finally managed to encircle and slay him right at the threshold of the entrance to the ladies' residency. In the meanwhile, Bhaago Bhaan had rushed the Soomro ladies for refuge with Jaam Abro. Finding the ladies' residency empty, the Pathans headed toward Jaam Abro, who, the protector of honour that he was, refused to handover the refuge seekers and smilingly chose to fight for their honour. But before he could do so, Saahal (Saael) Soomro went in to fight and laid down his life in the way of the cause. He was followed one after the other by Jaam Raahu Sammo and Mamat Jaam (Sammut Sammo), who too died fighting like honourable men. Saalaar Khan from the Pathans and Sabar Jaam from the Sammos struck at each other at the same moment and fell dead one upon the other. Jaam Abro was the last to take the field and die for his steadfastness in protecting the honour of the Soomro ladies, whom he already had had his youngest son Doongar Jaam take to the desert, where they were drowned in some ravine. The surviving Pathans of Alauddin returned wringing their hands in disappointment and distress.

"This is outline of the historical events.

"Now the question may be asked: How much realism the narrator of this epic has shown and his account is in accord

with the historical facts? No sensible person would pose such a question because even an erudite scholar like Firdausi would not measure up to the standard required. Even though the foregoing facts have been stated in relation to this war, a historian and a epic poet should be considered two separate characters."

Dr. Baloch, commenting upon the salient features, composition and presentation of the Epic, writes in his '*Preface*':

"So the myth and the historical element got integrated into the body of the Epic during the course of centuries. Sultan Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316 A. D.) did not personally command his forces in Sind. However, he did send his armies to Sind under the command of Ulugh Khan and Nusrat Khan. 'Chanesar' and 'Dodo' were among the Sumara rulers of Sind as confirmed by the contemporary evidence from history. According to *Tarikh-e-Jahan Gushai* and *Tarikh-e-Nasiri*, at the time of Sultan Jalaluddin Khawarzamshah's advent, Sinan al-Din Chanesar was the ruler of Lower Sind. Dodo was the last but one ruler of the Sumara line whose son ruled during the early reign of Sultan Feroze Shah Tughlaq, as confirmed by Mahru in his *Munsha'at*. It is only in this Epic that they figure as brothers and the central characters.

"During my present search for its content extending over a quarter of century (1951-1976), I found the Epic popular in all parts of Sind and also in the adjoining lands (Kutch and Jesalmer in India; Rahimyar Khan and the neighbouring districts of Punjab; and the Lasbela, Kachchi and Sibi districts of Baluchistan). In all, fourteen 'complete versions' (commencing from the valour of Dodo the elder to the battles of Abro Sammo) besides scores of others, were recorded, nearly half of them being artistic narrations which were taken down from some of the known minstrels and other qualified narrators in different parts of the country. Its literary merits consist in some impressive pieces of poetry, prose narration of great

merit, archaic forms of expression, and some earliest *gaha* compositions in Sindhi (the origin of which may go back to the *gahas* of the Buddhist period). In its narrative structure, the Epic reveals the remnants of the earliest 'Dramatic Art Form'; in its artistic narration-cum-singing, and indigenous form of 'opera' like presentation; and in its modes of singing a variety of music forms (*ragas*) accompanied by the different types of rhythm structures (*tals*). Beginning from early times, the Earthen Jar (*Dilo* or *Gharro*), the brass dish (*Thalee*), the *Yak-taro* (the single stringed instrument) have been progressively used as the accompanying instruments. Since the twenties of this century, the harmonium was introduced and used mainly by the *Manganhars* (minstrels) of Hyderabad District whose families were once attached to the court of the ruling Talpur Princes (1786-1843)."

Elaborating his answer to the question posed at the end of his version of the topography of the main events of the Epic, Prof. Mahram Khan says in the afore-cited 'Muqaddama':

"Epic poetry, in its own right, enjoys an independent position and occupies a special place, and hence ought to be viewed accordingly. What follows is an exposition of the origin and development of epic minstrelsy in Sindh.

"Beginning of Epic Minstrelsy

"The fact that Samaat tribes had welcomed the Arab commander, Mohammed bin Qasim, with singing shows that versification had been vogue in Sindh before the Arab advent. But if the account here is confined to epic minstrelsy, then we see it beginning in Sindh and Rajisthan during the early conquests of Islam, rudiments of which are found from the start of the Khatami and Abbasi caliphate (750 CE). During the caliphate of Mamoon al-Rasheed (813-833 CE), the governor of Sindh, Moosa bin Yahya (bin Khalid) had attacked Rajisthan and killed the king of Chitor, Raja Khhamaan Rai. This incident is narrated by a minstrel of Rajisthan named Desh Vijiah in his epic titled '*Khhamaan Raaso*' (870-890 CE). It is the earliest

epic of the region that has been found so far. The incident has also been corroborated by Col. James Todd in his book '*Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*'. Such war epics, which are called '*Raaso*' in Rajisthan and Thar, dealing with the conquests of Mehmood Ghaznavi and Mohammed Shahabuddin Ghauri up to the invasions of Alauddin Khilji are available in abundance. They deal less with historical facts and more with fictional bravery and are exaggerated eulogies of kings. Even though classed as early specimens of Hindi poetry, they are actually in Marwari-cum-Rajisthani language. On the basis of linguistic analysis, some scholars have termed it '*Gaatha Bhaasha*' (Language of *Gaahs*), while some others consider it '*Sandhia Bhaasha*' (Mixed Language). Hindi language simply did not exist at that time. It may be noted that annals of Hindi literature state it to have begun after Amir Khusro (d. 1360 CE) with the 'dohas' (couplets) of Ramanand (d. 1470 CE), the founder of Bhakti Movement, and Bhagat Kabir (d. 1518 CE). Sindhi '*dohiro*' (=dha=couplet) was being sung long before that. We do have some names of the versifiers of Sindhi *dohiro* who lived in the sixth and seventh centuries of the Common Era, and those dating from the ninth and tenth centuries' biographies are also available along with their Sindhi *dohiros*. But these verses are purely common and religious. Verses of political propaganda and preaching are an echo of exploits of the later crusaders and emperors.

"As in those days modern means of communication like radio and press were not available, the monarchies of Rajisthan, in order to remain ever ready to face the sudden and devastating onslaughts of Muslim conquerors, had engaged the services of strolling minstrels and bards to instill the spirit of patriotism and fighting among their subjects by singing eulogies of the battle-tested valour of their braves (as well as lampooning the cowards) and by depicting the battle scenes. (These eulogies of Rajput and lampoons of Muslims were, as a matter of course, streaked with religious prejudice.) It was deemed to be the only means of their survival. Rajisthan

was at the time a major center of political activities in the Subcontinent.

"When Sultan Mehmood started his attacks on Thar and Rajisthan, the king of Ajmer, Raja Besal Dev, confronted him. He was killed in the battle. A famous bard of the period named Narpati Nalh was present on the scene. By recounting '*Besal Raaso*', he awakened the whole Rajput nation. Thus all Rajput kings united under the leadership of the ruler of Ajmer, Prithviraj (Prithvirao) Chauhan, during the reign of Sultan Shahabuddin Ghauri, who defeated the allied forces in the famous battle of Tarain in 1192 CE and had Prithviraj put to death after capture. The slain Raja was immortalized by a courtier bard named Chund Berdai in his composition '*Prithviraj Raasa*'. [The then editor of the Sindhi Adabi Board's quarterly magazine '***Mehran***', Maulana Ghulam Mohammed Girami, in his footnote to the author's article titled 'Sumung Chaaran' published in the 1-2/1966 issue of the magazine, has this say about this epic: " 'Chandar Bardaai' and his 'Prithviraj Raasa' have become a controversial issue in the scholarly circles. Scholars and researchers are of the view that this book is a fake and an ascription, which was composed in the sixteenth or seventeenth century and ascribed to 'Chandar Bardaai'. Critics have examined its language as well as its text. Here is their final conclusion: Prithviraj Raasa contains ten percent words of Arabic and Persian languages. Assimilation of such a large number of Arabic and Persian words by the vernaculars of Ajmer and Delhi in so early a period was impossible. The history of Urdu as well as Hindi is not prepared linguistically to accept this assimilation. Moreover, the inaccurate and fictional way in which the seven defeats of Shahabuddin Ghauri have been described has also been decried by Hindu researchers themselves. Similarly, a number war weapons mentioned in the Raasa became available several centuries after the Sultan and Prithviraj in the days of Babar and the last Mughal kings; for example, cannons, guns, zanbrak and other firearms. The name of the king himself has been used incorrectly. Shahabuddin was his childhood name. On becoming king, he called himself Moizuddin Mohammed bin Saam, which name also appears on his decrees, documents and coins. Therefore, had the author of Raasa been a contemporary of Sultan Moizuddin, he would not have named the king as Shahabuddin. The mention of cannon and gun in the Raasa and the use of ten percent Arabic and Persian words in it show that it was composed during the Mughal Period because the presence of cannon and gun in India before the Mughal times cannot even been imagined. Mahamahu Padhia Kabiraach Shyamal Danji and Hifiz Mehmood Shirani have thus proved by historical probe that this composition is a fake. (See 'Hindi Navratan' p. 520, 'Punjab mein Urdu; p. 126").—Tr.]

Similarly, 'Vijya Raaso' composed by bard Nala Singh (1355 BE = *Bikarmi Era*), '*Hameer Raaso*' composed by bard Jodhraj about the king of Rathambore, Hameer Dev, and other such epics were sung by strolling minstrels throughout

Rajisthan. Yet another *'Hameer Raaso'* about the same Hameer Dev, which bard Sarang Dhar, the grandson of Chund Berdai, sung and popularized around 1357 BE. This epic also recounts the same incident of the defeat and killing of Hameer Dev by Alauddin Khilji in 1301 CE. Dodo Rai Soomro had crossed swords with the forces of the same Alauddin at Wigahkot. This incident was composed and sung to fame by the renowned court minstrel of the Soomros named Bhaag Faqeer (Bhaago Bhaan)."

Bhaago Bhaan is traditionally believed to have been the primary narrator of this Tale, but art of Tale-Telling did not begin with him. Dr. Baloch has dealt with this point in his *'Study'* under the caption *'Principal Aspects and Fundamental Principles of Tale-Telling'*. He writes:

"The art of Tale-Telling is in vogue in Sindh since ancient times. The process of telling and singing a tale began with introduction of *gaahs* about it. This process is certainly ancient because the Sindhi word *'gaah'* is reminiscent of *'gaatha'* of Buddhist age. The process of Tale-Telling prevalent in Sindh in the present age goes back at least to the Soomro Period. It was a legendary and romantic period in the history of Sindh, during which a number of tales arose, which were sung afterwards. [As a result of the advent of Sultan of Ghazna in Western India including Sindh during the first decade of the second millennium, 'Once again the main urban centres of Sindh were administered by officers whose headquarters were outside Sindh, and who were there to protect international trading routes and exact tribute from the chiefs of Sindh. The natives of Sindh found safety in becoming river-folk and boatmen, or desert dwellers and camel drivers, and produced the earliest extant or a literature in Sindhi which has sometimes been described as desert melodies. Some of the famous folktales of Sindh belong to this period, including Sasui and Punhu, Marui and Umar, Leela and Chanesar etc'.— S. Z. Lari, op. cit., p. 70].

"Among these all, the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar was told more than others and sung throughout the length and breadth of the realm. It was with the telling of the Tale of Dodo Chanesar that the skill and expertise of telling tales reached its zenith.

"In different parts of Sindh we heard different

sughars (skilled narrators) telling different tales, that of Dodo-Chanesar was heard almost at every place. Each one of the tellers of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar was seen to have a unique expertise of telling, skill of dramatizing and style of singing the Tale, keeping all of which in view reveals following aspects of the art of Tale-Telling in Sindh.

"(a) Versifier & Narrator: Tale teller and singer is as though the narrator of a tale. Creator and versifier of a tale is often some other person. That is why it is a must for the tale-teller to keep referring to the real versifier of the tale in accordance with the ancient principle of tale telling in Sindh." For example, a mendicant would usually begin his tale-telling by saying

> *"Poet has composed the verse, this mendicant voices it*
> or
> *"Poet has expressed a reality, mendicant may voice it but how should he voice it*

"This is a fine principle of telling a tale by which both the versifier and the narrator are appreciated.....There are two main aspects of the skill of tale-telling in Sindhi, 'Gaalh Veechaarin' (Tale-Think) and 'Gaalh Gaaen' (Tale-Sing).

> "(1) Gaalh Veechaarin: This is a technical term of Sindhi art of tale-telling. Tale-telling began with tale talking, articulating a story, that is, without any skill, in the common day to day dialect or in smooth tongue just for the amusement of friends. It was when tale talking became skilled that the process of tale-telling began, and when *gaahs* were introduced in the structure of tale that the aspects of skill of *Gaalh Veecharin* (Tale-Think) and *Galh Gaaen* (Tale-Sing) came into being. *Gaahs* were versified and contained hints and allusions to its events and locales, which needed teasing out and exposition in simple language. This exposition came to be known as Tale-Think... Tale-Think too has two aspects, narration or account and scene-recreation, that is, effective statement of the tale, and

rendering the tale in such a way as to make every scene seem real.

"(I) Account/Narration of Tale: Narration of tale has a special meaning in the context of tale-telling. That is to say, account should not only be couched in fine language but it should also be normative and not un-normative. One, its language should be pleasant and impressive with select and beautiful words so as to make the narration flower-studded. The tale-teller should have mastery over language, his voice should be clear and sweet, he should not use any sour word but speak well and gently, adorn the tale by using proverbs and precedents. Two, account of tale should be decent means that, besides being commensurate with status of each character of the tale, it should be in accord with the community norms and social values. Tale-creator poets and tale-teller professionals of Sindh have conscientiously adhered to the normative while creating or telling a tale..... The conflict between Chanesar and Dodo is an ugly aspect of this tale but artists have told it with great skill. They have not only praised Dodo and others but have also redeemed Chanesar in the end.

"(II) Recreation of Scene: Apart from making the account of his tale effective and standard, it is essential for a skillful tale-teller to so render it as to reproduce its action and atmosphere before the eyes. This is 'play setting' aspect or dramatic mode of tale-telling, which has to be maintained. Skilled tale-teller should speak in a distinct voice for each character of the tale so that every character can be identified without being named. He should speak as

Dodo in a voice that Dodo should speak in. He should measure, shake, arrange, lower or raise the articulations on different occasions so that import of the situation in the tale becomes evident, that is to say, the emotions of happiness and pleasure, laughter and mirth, hatred and chagrin, humility and meekness, dread and awe, etc, are expressed as per occasion.

"(2) Gaalh Gaaen: It was after the insertion of *gaahs* in it that the tale came to be sung. In the course of present research, relatively more mentions were made of such tale-tellers as did their tale-telling in the Loraau tune. Loraau is a purely Sindhi pattern of music or raga and has existed from ancient times. From its popularity in telling of this Tale (which continues in present times) it seems that this Tale was told in this raga during earlier age also. The skill of Tale-Sing matured with passing of time, and during the late age, particularly in about 1700-1930 CE, it attained its peak. The repertoire of ragas and musical instruments employed in singing of this Tale increased in this period. Skilled narrators and vocalists took up telling of the Tale in different parts of the realm, and in every part the style of Tale-Sing came to acquire local colour. Different tunes and musical instruments became popular in different areas, and were bequeathed from generation to generation by masters and theirs pupils. If any pupils happened to be accomplished, they took to new ragas and musical instruments for singing the Tale. In the course of present research, it transpired that in different parts of the realm skilled narrators and vocalists have been singing this Tale in Loraau, Raano, Kohyaari, Bheravi, Saarung, Joag, Sorath, Pahaari and Tilling ragas....

"(b) Musical Instruments for Tale-Telling: New and more instruments came to be progressively used for singing of the Tale Probably beat of earthen pitcher was used for singing of a tale in the earliest times because it was available in every dwelling and place. Later beat of brass dish was used for the purpose. Up to this late period, some did their tale telling by the beat of dish, while some did so using both the dish and pitcher at the same time." Yaktaaro (the single stringed mandolin-like instrument) followed the earlier two. "However, some skillful vocalists have used sophisticated instruments for tale singing since the last (18^{th}) century". These include sarangi, harmonium and sitar.

(c) Poetic Content of Tale: "Apart from singing a tale in different ragas and by playing different instruments, styles and modes of singing also became variegated". In between tale telling *gaahs,* interspersed with hints and allusion to the events and locales of the tale, came to be intoned. *Gaah*-Think came in the wake of *Gaah*-Sing.

In the present age, tale-telling is opened with a verse in praise of, in that order, God, the Holy Prophet SAIW, the (first four) Pious Caliphs, the Punjtun (first five descendants of the Holy Prophet SAIW), mention of the saints and holy personages of Sindh, and of paying of homage to Dodoians or Dodo such as

'I praise Dodoians, let the whole world hearken'.

Second verse would be of prayer and well wishing such as. May God keep everyone in comfort and ease, and no one may have to suffer a misfortune or calamity. For instance, some prayer lines :

'Ant hungers for a small seed, Provident provides it daily,
Elephant hungers for a maund, God doesn't cut it by a morsel even'.

* *

'May Sindh ever prosper, where saints congregate.'

*

'May the village headman not die, on him is reliance,
May the mother of Kalhas not die, her children would be orphaned.'

*

'May the milch not die in rainy season, nor a sharecropper's bull.'

*

'May an elephant not fall sick, nor a chief become pauper.'

Some verses contain, often in the beginning, epigrams of wisdom and sagacity such as the following, which are to the effect that if any near one becomes a foe, he would inflict damage (like Chanesar).

'Salinity is enemy of fortress, net of fish.'

*

'Salinity is enemy of fortress,
Dodo's foe is his own brother.'

After singing of a verse (gaah or baet) is completed, that is, after its last line is sung, a dictum is intoned as a kind of refrain for it to spread overhead as a shading sheet. Every tale-teller keeps a number of such dictums, which slightly vary from other tale-tellers', and are mostly of the nature of divine oneness. For example:

'*Haadi [Divine Guide]! You Allah!*'

*

'Dodo Rai's hereabouts! sir, Dodo Rai's hereabouts!'

*

'Alo alo! o Hadi Allah! o sweet Allah!'

*

'One Hadi Allah! You sweet Allah!'

*

'Alo Allah! Hadi Allah! You Allah!'

*

'Beneficent alo alo! Hadi Allah! You o Allah!

"(d) Literary Importance of Tale: In the different traditions and accounts of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar, countless *gaahs* and *baets* occur, which are of genuine literary importance. Their analysis and study reveals some new aspects of the antiquity of Sindhi language, history of Sindhi language, local dialects of Sindhi language, and history of Sindhi literature. The material compiled in the 2-volume publication on the subject is a store-house of rare words and their structures, phrases and idioms, which can serve as document and source for the study of the antiquity as well as history of Sindhi language. This record is rich enough for understanding the local nuances of speech prevalent in Sindh and its border areas as well as for studying various vocabularies and idioms of Sindhi language.

This material is also valuable for the history of Sindhi literature. For example, most of the *gaahs* of Saami Bhaan appear to be of Samma Period (1333-1524 CE) even though some lines in certain *gaahs* are perhaps later accretions. So are some other *gaahs* and a couple of *baets*. In certain other traditions some gaahs are found, which appear to be quite ancient. This Sindhi poetry is a rich treasure for the study of Sindhi language as well as literature.....

The Tale constructor versifiers and skilled narrators have come up with handsome situational proverbs and examples, which reflect social and moral values of Sindh and are masterpieces of Sindhi literature. For instance.-

> *'Everyone has a right to respond even when the other is a king.'*
> *'Fie upon friendship of weak, hail to enmity of strong.'*
> *'Love is not gained by messages, until one goes in person.'*
> *'New comers be attended to before, then the sitting.'*
> *'A lonely tree is a mere reed even if tall n' strong.'*
> *'Butter looks better inside a churn, yoghurt outside.'*
> *Brothers are great stuff, may they live long.'*

Similarly, many *gaahs* and versified lines testify to high moral values and are examples of great poetry. For instance.-

Picture of young Nangar:

'In Dodo's court a petted child struts,
Gold like Soomro swaggers like peacock.'

Sonal, the fiancée of Nangar:

'Like lightning she shot up, the graceful lass,
That daughter of Dodo strikes like thunderbolt,
Whose name be Sonal is an ornament to her girlfriends,
Prettier than moon n' sun, she's forsooth a houri.'

Reason of turbaning Dodo:

'Dodo's all gold, without a touch of silver,
Let's turbane Dodo, on whose head it becomes.

When Chanesar doesn't relent, Dodo retorts:

'Hollows can't touch heavens, river hole bubbles,
Now Sindh is betwixt swords, the brave who wins may rule'.

Strength of Dodo:

'Sleeping lion stretches his limbs, breaks four-poster bed,
Who will bear a blow of Dodo Dodoian!.'

Chanesar describes onslaught of Soomro army:

'Muskets light up like lightning in overcast sky,
It comes pouring like clouds in rainy weather.'

Nangar's word:

'There's no telling about life, I'll embrace death,
Playing with steel, never step back.'

Nangar speaks:

'Ironsmiths have wrought our swords n' cutlasses,
Some of gold, some of silver, we kiss n' tie them around our waists.'

Attacks by Nangar:

He falls upon the aliens like the east wind,
Nangar doesn't fall back as if he were a river in spate.'

Mangar stands steadfast:

'Even as he sustained eighteen sword cuts on head,
He stood his ground like an unfeeling rock'.

This Tale is a great war-epic. It is being sung by skilled narrators since centuries. In their *gaahs* and *baets* they depict battlefields, forces and their flanks, braves and their charges, deaths and martyrdoms. The ancient versified traditions of this Tale later led to founding of the genre of war epic in Sindhi poetry. For example, in the following *gaahs* and *baets* peculiar words and terms of epic are present, which later poets used in their war poetry.

'Battle tumult is their crop, cutlass their field,
Egyptians (sharp swords) are unsheathed, rich crop is reaped.'

*

'Braves are happy to be roasted on spits like moths,
They sacrifice themselves with their eyes open.'

*

'Sons of soil took the uproar of battle to peak,
Cutting heads of invaders they consigned them to God's mercy.'

*

'Abro astride blue mare, Mamat riding brownish,
Trample hordes across Kaajho in the Jarejian war.

*

'Abro brother is skillful, thundering Rai (chief) thunders,
He made many braves writhe near Soomris,
Vultures gloat seeing Rai lying on battlefield,
They struck Mahmat, the valiant breathed his last,
It's God's writ, He Himself is the cause.

*

'Beat of war-drum causes fear, wet wood burns,
Rust be scoured, steel burnished, sharp swords polished.'

*

'Ministers went in to fight wearing swords,
With banners, chains, howdahs, cutlasses, quivers n' arrows,
They charge n' slice the restless topknots,
Soomro, you're born of a chaste, chastity is your hallmark!'

*

'Roused to wrath, he puts on armour,
There in the battlefield Aasio Sodho decapitates Saalaar.'

*

'Die, kill, if you must, my husband,
Even then one must do good turns.'

*

'Rising to her feet, graceful Saaraan tells her hubby.'
Die or kill, never run back.'

*

'I'd willingly foment the blows borne by you in face, husband,
Fomenting them would be a shame if they be in the back.'

Antecedents of Bhaago Bhaan

Both Dr. Baloch and Prof. Mahram Khan are inclined to accept the tradition to the effect that Bhaago Bhaan was the primary narrator of this epic and the originator of Sindhi epic poetry. Hence "to ignore his person", the latter scholar writes in his aforesaid 'Muqaddamo', "would be a great injustice. But it would be a greater folly to ignore his person and accept only his narrative. His antecedents are, therefore, discussed here in as much detail as possible.

"Bhaago Bhaan belonged to an ancient and famous community of minstrels in the Subcontinent, which has also been known by different names like *Bhaand, Bhutt (Bhund), Paat, Paarat*, etc. In olden times when the skill of writing had not become common here, even then respect accorded to sagacious reciters and narrators was no less than that of Brahmins. Singing and playing musical instruments was their ancestral heritage, and they were quite adept in rhythm,

lyricism and music. Besides, memorizing literary and historical matters was their family tradition, a kind of syllabus, for them. Their memory was thus exercised They could recite genealogies of important families and ruling dynasties of Hind and Sindh going back into several generations. Many of such genealogies, their term for which was '*kabat*', are still somewhat available with their progeny. They also knew by heart the achievements and exploits of monarchs and big events of history of long ago.

"Because of their extensive knowledge of history, observation of government working, expertise in literature and other intellectual abilities they commanded great respect and influence in royal courts. (Even in the court of Mughal emperor Akbar such insightful minstrels as Gung Bhutt, Manohardas, Birbal and Nerhari were present.) Arranging matrimonial matches among royalty was, so to say, their special domain, and hence diplomacy automatically became their responsibility. They were considered close confidantes of the Rajput kings of Rajisthan and Thar. Their loyalty, sincerity and trustworthiness were openly acknowledged even by Soomro chieftains. The persona of Bhaago Bhaan should be viewed against this background.

"Several generations of Bhaago Bhaan's lineage had been in the service of Soomros, and as such he was a kind of homegrown minstrel of theirs. He accordingly enjoyed the status of their adviser and emissary..... Sometimes this elder was made, because of his faithfulness, responsible for settling household matters also. An instance of this is the following incident. At the time when the invading forces reached the border and to confront which the name of Chanesar's son Nangar was decided upon for strategic reasons, there arose the domestic problem of apprising the prince's mother, who was then busy making arrangements for his wedding. Bhaago Bhaan volunteered to undertake the delicate task. As the battle was raging, he approached the invader as emissary. There Chanesar Rai, on borrowed strength, makes the brazen

demand:

> *"They're asking for the hand of Baaghi, Soomros!*

"Bhaago Bhaan tells off Chanesar in the very presence of soldiers:

> *"I remember all Dodos and Bhoongars, I've witnessed many reigns,*
> *No Soomro has gone bad before as you've done, Chanesar,*
> *All're aware that you've a little of ironsmiths in you,*
> *Your brain now harks back to live coals n' exudes heat of anvils.*

"In short, during the course of war, Bhaago Bhaan performed his assigned duty conscientiously so much so that when defeat was imminent, he escorted hundred are so Soomris from the ladies' quarter at night for refuge with Jaam Abro. This is a historic act of faithfulness by Bhaago Faqeer.

"These facts of history show that Bhaago Faqeer was present during the war from its start to finish. His account of the events is, therefore, based on eye witness and personal observation. This point would be discussed in the following pages.

"The descendents of Bhaago Bhaan have continued calling themselves 'Bhaag' Faqeer. In accordance with their hereditary trait of loyalty and steadfastness, they are still clung like tomb attendants to what remains of Roopah Maari and Wigahkot in the desolate desert of Kutch as if to preserve their ancestor's legacy of honour protection.

"Bhaago Bhaan and Epic-Minstrelsy

"One of the impressions left by the earlier mentioned list of epics and historical background could be that the Epic of Dodo-Chanesar arose from the epic minstrelsy introduced by the minstrels and bards of Rajisthan under the title of *Raaso*. It could, accordingly, be called 'Dodo Raaso' and Bhaago Bhaan

could be treated as an imitator of Narpati Nalh's, Chund Berdai's and Nala Singh's school of epic minstrelsy. It is not necessarily so. It is just one side of the picture.

"A reading of the history of ancient Sindh reveals that old tribes here, like the pre-Islamic bedouin tribes of Arabia, have also been measuring strength with one another. We find many indications of this in our popular tales. Our old forms of verse like *gech* and *gaah* too show its traces. From it all one can conclude that the then prominent versifiers here have sung of such fights and clashes to keep their memory alive. During the Arab caliphate, al-Jaahiz (684 CE) wrote in praise of Sindhi verse. A well known poet of ours, Sumang Chaarun (950 -1025 CE) by name, lived at the termination of the Arab caliphate period and beginning of the Soomro period. His lyrical verse in Sindhi is available with us. He is historically important also because he gave us war poetry in the genre of *gaae*. A *gaae* in support of Jaam Hothi is ascribed to him:

"Trees can't stop the blow struck by Hothi,
He joins battle with any who doesn't behave.

"This proves that several centuries before Bhaago Bhaan Sindhi verse had been imaginative and vigorous enough to express feats of bravery with eloquence. It would, therefore, not be proper or correct to consider Bhaago Faqeer just a follower of Narpati Nalh and Chund Berdai and his epic a copy of the Rajisthani *raaso*. This epic is obviously a product of the soil of Sindh and result of the natural growth of ancient Sindhi verse. It, therefore, typifies Sindhi culture and signifies spirit of sacrifice and honourability.

"This epic found a place in the history of Sindhi literature for the first time in 1937 CE with the authority of the founder of our literary history, Alhaaj Khan Bahadur Mohammed Siddiq Memon. The late Khan Bahadur begins his history with *gaahs* of this epic. But he had not been able to discover the name of the composer of these gaahs. This scholarly feat

of Memon Sahib was performed in the days when no history of this nature existed in Sindh; indeed, no one could have had any idea of such a book. The said author did not have the means or sources or precedents to make use of for writing such a unique book that are commonly available to all and sundry nowadays. Under the circumstances, it was a magnificent achievement of his to have unearthed the history of Sindhi literature up to the time of Dodo-Chanesar. This was the first ever History of Sindhi Literature that was prescribed as a compulsory reading for the syllabus of the subject of Sindhi.

"In the course of the modern researches carried out during the twenty-five years after Independence some scholar-divers have brought up from the deep for all to see authentic accounts of many ancient poets as well as their respective verses antedating Bhaago Bhaan. But who takes the trouble of appreciating these masterpieces? It is regrettable that some ordinary sort of literary historians, who unfortunately happen to be teachers also, continue to depend by rote upon the late Memon's old history. (Their comprehension of it remains limited to this that since Sindhi verse begins with an epic [of Dodo-Chanesar], so does that of other world languages. Reiteration of such inaccuracies in their histories does nothing but misinform the upcoming generation.) Since that history does not mention the name of the narrator of the epic, these historians-cum-teachers also are far from accepting Bhaago Bhaan as it narrator; some of them even think his very existence to be unproven. The reason for their thinking seems to be this: They have not bothered to study the results of modern research, nor are they aware of the fundamental values of the genesis of literature.

"That Bhaago Bhaan was a historical person and that he was the originator of the epic of Dodo-Chanesar is borne out by the following.

" In order to preserve and keep the memory of such national feats as this one, the minstrels and bards of olden

times always remained active. In the days when calligraphy was not in vogue nor did any public library exist, these strolling narrators and story-tellers acted as a kind of mobile library. They not only compiled historically important events for communicating to the people but also had their progeny memorize them as their legacy, and they in turn transmitted, after pruning and trimming what they had memorized, to the people. For comprehending this continuing process, just one example of strolling bard Chund Berdai's *raaso* may be cited. According to scholars of Hindi literature, Chund Berdai had done no more than vocalize the basic structure (early outline) of this genre by humming and left its rhythmizing and crooning to his son Jalhan, who on his part, after setting it to music and singing it rhythmically, bequeathed it to his son Saarung Dhar. Thus its final versified shape came to be established in Saarung Dhar's time (1537 Vikrami). In the course of this continuing process, this great war story of India has survived in the croons and lived on the tongues of professional minstrels for another full five centuries up to 1700 CE when Thaakur Amar Singh of Mewar had it committed to writing. In Rajasthan such national events are called by the name of '*khhiaat*', the literal meaning of which is 'traditional history'. Many sources of Col. Todd's famous book 'History of Rajisthan' are such *Khhiaats*, after collation of which he was able to reach correct conclusions and prepare his authoritative work of scholarship. Similarly our own epic, which we have ignored well into the twentieth century for no other reason than ignorance of the basic facts of our history, has come down to us over so many centuries through the same continuing process of compilation, bequeathing and transmission by the descendants of Bhaago Bhaan. Besides being a hereditary narrator, professional literator, recognized musician and poet laureate, Bhaago Bhaan was also the only surviving eye witness of the tragic event.

"Development of the Epic of Dodo-Chanesar

"In view of his great love for and devotion to the family of Bhoongar, the defeat at Wigahkot was an unforgetta-

ble shock for Bhaago Bhaan. The tragic event affected him so deeply that he became obsessed with it and began to roam from place to place singing of it in sad and doleful tunes. Thus the people began to talk of Dodo and tales of his valour spread far and wide. His battle royal with the Khilji forces as a great commander and fight unto death were stupendous feats, which earned him a hero's place and deep empathy in the hearts of the people. Public empathy and interest moved the grieving Bhaago Bhaan family to sing of the tragic occurrence from village to village with greater zeal and passion. Thus the basic outline as well as initial structure and technique were laid down by him and the first generation of his progeny. Those of his later generations have contributed their share, each according to his repertoire and expertise, in the development of the epic. So must have some other non-family minstrels and bards down the centuries; but despite these outside contributions, the copyright of the epic belongs to the Bhaago Bhaan and his family.

"Bird's Eyeview of War *Gaahs* (Verses)

"By reading this epic again and again one feels that the real hero of the war was Chanesar's about-to-be-married son Nangar Rai, who launched the resistance and became the first prominent martyr of the ensuing battle. As Dodo sends the young bridegroom away to the warfront, the youth's mother cries out:

> *"When my brave son goes to be slain by Aladin's soldiers,*
> *His mother would become an ascetic for she has no other son*
> *She, the wretch of Wigahkot, would then be your obligation,*
> *Soomro.*

"Dodo's daughter Sonal, the bride-to-be of young Nangar, who is secluded in *wanwaah* (a ritual prelude to nuptials, when the bride-to-be remains in seclusion, unwashed and without change of clothes, for a few days), jumps to her feet to do the farewell:

> *"The graceful lass stood up like lightning,*
> *Dodo's daughter devours like thunderbolt.*

"Pointing out the risks and dangers of the intended venture, she reminds Nangar of the sanctity of their upcoming nuptials and his mother's hopes and expectations:

"Nangar, you've the thread of marital vow around your wrist,
Your betrothed is observing wanwah,
Aunt has had ornaments moulded,
How can they remain moulded?
Mom has had the trousseau dyed,
How can it remain dyed?
Lest you've me wear black,
How can God let it happen?

"But resolute Nangar pronounces his last words and heads for the front:

"We'll now be married by the Holy Prophet himself.

"He then alongwith his cousin Mangar, rushes to Veerawah, where

"They fought with swords n' cutlasses, hurled spears,
'Strike, Fight ' they shout n' say nothing else,
For thirteen days men struck n' fought on with swords,
On fourteenth day the battlefield saw flashes of adversaries' blows,
O brother, on sixteenth day the day broke n' men saw the sun rising.

"In this battle Nangar and Mangar, trumpeting like a mad elephant, fell upon the enemy like thunderbolt and whirlwind, and struck it so heavily that their headgears and helmets broke into pieces and some commanders of Aladin were downed.

"Nangar and Mangar together struck blow upon blow,
Crowns were smashed to bits, many a man was wounded.

"In short, these braves of Kutch became one with earth hitting sharp cutters and hurling spears in this game of steel striking steel. When their dead bodies were brought to

Wigahkot, Dodo Rai was shocked, and he sent a challenge to the invading commanders, who began to ask around if Dodo was also as brave as the two late youths or just an empty vessel. Chanesar filled them in:

"He's as high as mast with a head the size of a large pitcher,
Arms like oars of boat, waist like a four legged cot,
None but a lion can bear the blow of Dodoian Dodo.

"Addressing Aladdin he adds:

"When my brother came riding to the battlefield,
Earth will tremble n' trees will break wind,
Hordes will be terrified to breathe that day,
Those of yours, who've gorged on rich foods, will not fight.

Now Chanesar is regretful:

"Salinity is enemy of fortress n' net is enemy of fish,
Slumber is enemy of men n' adornment is enemy of dromedary,
Shark is enemy of small fish n' hawk is enemy of birds.

"Thus these verses eloquently describe the breaking forth of the characters' passions, the raging battles and scenes of terrible warfare, close combats between braves and their distressing deaths. The verses cited herein are some of those that are metrical and rimed. But the epic contains many verses that are either non-metrical or sans rime or comprise lines of varying lengths. The last appear to have been made up later by joining of small verses having similar import because in those remote times only short verses were composed and large verses simply did not exist.

"The verses of the epic cannot be appreciated by reading alone. To enjoy them in full measure, one must hear them sung for singing is the life breath of verse. A composition of lines to deserve the title of verse must lend itself smoothly to intoning, otherwise it would be just a piece of prose. For one who is fortunate enough to have heard the verses of this epic sung by a melodious vocalist, this entire paper work would be only be a jumble of lifeless black lines.

"Beginning and Historical Evolution of the Art of Tale-Telling

"'*God created man and endowed him with speech*'- (Quran). It is his faculty of speech that enables man to converse. In the nomadic period of history, men used to converse at night around a campfire. Some elder in the family narrated incidents of his simple and naïve life or retold superstitious anecdotes he had heard from his own elders. The common and special characters of these anecdotes used to be, more often than not, fictional giants and fairies, goblins and demons, or genies and animals. This led to the founding of myth and superstitious belief. Some special men, who managed to become tribal chiefs because of their physical strength or mental faculty, were metamorphosed into giants or demons posthumously.

"When nomadic era ended, the age of permanent settlement began with founding of village life. Headmen of villages were appointed and small scale governments came into being. After their dayiong drudgeries, the villagers gathered at sundown at a central place for, besides discussing collective issues, relaxing through light conversation including story telling, singing and dancing, which led, by and by, to the emergence of a class of story tellers or singers. Early headmen now began to appear in later stories in semi-human form instead of the earlier non-human form; making a god out of this or that one was not rare. Thus began the practice of hero worship. In due course of time these small scale governments amalgamated to form early city states, rulers of which later became symbolic characters of popular tales by attribution of highly exaggerated or fabulous feats to them. From these arose '*annals of kings*'.

"From early tales emerged stories, which became the basis of semi-historical narratives. Some pivotal lines were sung in lyrical notes and designated as '*gaau*' (*gaah*). '*Gaah-based narratives*' should be considered the foundation of the art of story telling.

"Root of the word '*gaah*' is the Sindhi infinitive '*gaaen*', which means 'singing'. Hence its literal meaning is also humming, rhythm and beat. But this is intended to signify such lyrical sentences and melodious phrases as contain marks of the bygone days. Some salient and fundamental contents of semi-historical narratives that became an interesting subject of general conversation and gained popular currency, were initially hummed and crooned. These lyrical sentences and melodious phrases came to be sung in consonance with time and occasion. In order to have these sung airs mark time, rudimentary musical instruments like '*thaali*' (brass dish), '*Khhartaal*' (a castanets-like instrument consistiong of two pieces of wood, which are striken together to produce music) or '*Jhaanjh*' (music producing mini bells) were invented over the passage of time. In the Punjab '*chumto*' (tongs) was used for this purpose. The early short *gaahs* developed into long *gaahs*, which are sung in great historical narratives.

"Dr. N. A. Baloch, the renowned research scholar of Sindhi language and literature, has recently compiled all such *gaah*-based narratives into an anthology. He has also collected and published numerous 'Love Stories of Sindh' as well as 'Famous Sindhi Tales'. Perusal of his commentary upon and historical analysis of them reveals that because of the general popularity and public interest in such semi-historical and historical stories, the professional minstrels and bards of the realm began to sing them for people's entertainment first in public gatherings and then in special functions. In the beginning, general stories and some short narratives began to be depicted with the aid of some lyrical *gaahs*. '*Doman Sonaro aen Vikio Daataar*', '*Hameer Soomro aen Bobna Jaraar*' as well as '*Phul Wado* aen *Laakhho Phulaani*' are some of the early stories and tales that came into circulation at first. Afterwards, special historical narratives and great war epics like the well known '*Moriro Malah aen Maangar Muchh*', '*Dhoal Maaru*', '*Leela-Chanesar*', '*Mokhhi-Mataara*', '*Saiful Malook*', '*Shah Behraam*' and '*Doolah Darya Khan*' (all these have also been

published recently) began to be recited in long *gaahs* (*baets*) before special functions and large public gatherings. The Tale of *'Dodo-Chanesar'* is, however, much more popular than all of these. It was sung and popularized throughout the length and breadth of Sindh by minstrels and bards since the fourteenth century CE. This is how the singular art of minstrelsy has progressed through early stages and phases of evolution.

"Professional minstrels, instead of remaining confined to effective depiction of these narratives and stories, now began to sing them methodically. 'To prelude respectfully with hymns to God and the Holy Prophet; to start in a dignified manner; to elucidate salient features of the narrative by repeating in prose with appropriate words and sentences, idioms and proverbs, sayings and maxims as well as examples and verse-lines; and to sing together in melody the *gaahs* and descriptive *baets* (stanzas) in tune and rhythm with musical instruments' are the signs of the zenith of accomplishment by minstrelsy.

"The *gaahs* of ancient tales were sung in smooth, straight and simple tunes. But in the case of each of the later special historical narratives, a unique and particularized style of singing came to be established. *'Doolah Darya Khan'*, *'Leela-Chanesar'*, *'Dhoal Maaru'*, and *'Shah Behraam'* are all composed in their own individualistic tunes and airs. However, in the case of the style and tone of *'Dodo-Chanesar'*, skilled vocalists have done much break and remake of its tunes and ragas. As a rule, all war epics are sung in tune *'Kedaaro'*. But this epic is now sung in the *'Sorath'*, *'Husaini'* and *'Raano'* tunes also.

"The narratives were initially sung to the playing of rudimentary musical instruments – *chumto*, *jhaajh* and *thaali* - and later came to be sung more and more to the playing of *'dilo'* (earthen pitcher) and *yaktaaro* (single-stringed mandolin played with plectrum) and even of *tamburo* (a metal-stringed instrument like *sitar*) and *nurr* (a woodwind instrument like piccolo). In recent times some master

minstrels have introduced *dholuck* (a drum-like percussion played with hands) and harmonium also. But in present times the crooners of Musᶜo Bhurgri *in* Hyderabad Subdivision, who have no equal in the art of minstrelsy all across Sindh, rely solely on such fine musical instruments as *tamburo, sitar, saarangi* (a fiddle-like instrument) and *tablo* (a drum-like percussion, dissimilar to dholuck, played with hands). Some forty years ago [i.e., in 1930s] there was an elderly leader of a hereditary band of minstrels, named Inayat faqeer, who was not only a past master of minstrelsy but also a musician of distinction. (Even when he reached *taar saptak* i.e. *taep asthan,* no one could feel any change in his demeanor; even in ascent and descent of his sound movement he appeared to be smiling.) He was, therefore, considered the top vocalist of Sindh in the art of singing right up to the establishment of Pakistan. The current mode of minstrelsy was also developed by him. He used to sing this epic in tunes *'Kalyaan'* and *'Kedaaro'*. This matchless vocalist of Sindh passed away, aged around seventy, some years after the establishment of Pakistan. After his death, his sister's four sons jointly took up the narration with each of them respectively playing his favourite of the above mentioned four musical instruments – large *Tamburo, Saarangi*, small *sitar* and *tablo*. Their voices were so passionate and their singing so captivating that war scenes would appear before one's eyes, and sometimes one felt oneself right there in the battlefield. Apart from this personal experience, there are some other examples of this strange magic working. When minstrels in the course of a singing session at the bungalow of a grandee of Sindh (no need to give his name) sang the *baets* depicting the martyrdom of Nangar Rai, the grandee became so overcome with emotion that he fired gun-shots in the courtyard. Finding the participants afraid and unnerved, he said, 'We're doing this to welcome Nangar the groom.' All the four minstrels died one after the other some years ago. Now their progeny, despite waning of public interest and paucity of musical sessions, is keeping up the same melodious artistry.

"Though this Epic is resonating in the folk literature of Sindh even today, majority of literate city dwellers is unaware of it. Major reason for this state of affairs is that up till now it has remained an oral tradition confined to rural fairs, out-houses and inns."

***

THE EPIC

Dr. Baloch's afore mentioned 2-volume work is the culmination of his arduous trek spanning quarter of a century, in the course of which he not only personally heard most of the forty-nine oral traditions of the Tale from skilled narrators, professional minstrels, bards and mendicants but also examined four published accounts of and two classical poets' allusions to it.

Text of the Tale that appears in the following pages is, by and large, reproduction in translation of its vocal rendering by Dost Ali s/o Jummo Faqeer, a hereditary professional minstrel, for the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, Islamabad, which recorded it and also published it in book form. The reproduction is also interspersed with occasional insertions, especially of gaahs and baets, from the oral traditions compiled by Dr. Baloch in his 2-volume work.

Prose and verse repetitions appearing in the text are, as expounded by Dr. Baloch in 'Study' and quoted hereinabove, are by way of 'Galh jo Veechaar' (Tale-Think) and 'Galh jo Gaaen' (Tale-Sing), while frequent use of present tense is by way of scene-recreation

Throughout the Epic, the invader king is referred to as 'Aladin' (pronounced 'Aalaadeen') and not 'Alauddin' in all the oral as well as written versions. This trend has been adhered to in the translation also.

Allah's name first and foremost

First and foremost is the name of Allah,
Be servile to none else;
Depend on Him,
Upon whom the whole world depends;
As willed by the Almighty,
Sky stands sans pillar n' post;
Stars sparkle all across it,
N' moon shines in four directions;
The Master has installed,
The sun over terra firma;
Leader is Mustafa of Madina,
Foot pilgrims are headed towards him;
Having ended their journey,
Foot pilgrims have performed Hajj;
O servant, follow way of the Prophet,
For it's the path of Islam.

*

First n' foremost, best of all is the name of Allah,
Second best is the name of Muhammad [SAIW],
Renown is for the generous who builds mendicants' dwelling,
Qalandar is resting on the bank of koonchi,
I praise the Dodoians, let the whole world hearken.

May Sindh ever prosper, where saints congregate,
I praise Dodoians, who're grandsons of Bhoongar Rai.

Men decide to hold turban-tying ceremony

Hearken, Bhoongar reigns over the realm of Roopah,*
He's a hereditary king, wise n' sagacious,
On his ascension awe spread in all directions,
He's self willed, delights in warring.

*

Bugle is sounded, you know why,
As God willed, Bhoongar is one with earth,
Empty throne of Roopah will now cause outcry.*

[*According to Prof. Khan, Roopah was not the seat of government but a maari (mansion), which the Soomro dynasts had built. They ruled from a fortress called Wigahkot.-Tr.]

They are Soomros, Dodo and Chanesar. Both are brothers. Chanesar is elder, Dodo is younger. The turban has come down to the brothers from their grandfather. Throne is unoccupied. It should be occupied. A king should be installed. Dodo should try to do it by inviting all relatives and clan's men. Faqeer narrates in *baets* (stanzas).

It was just a couple of days since Bhoongar Rai died,
Men decided on holding the turban-tying ceremony,
Dodo Rai sent out letters of invitation for the fateful assembly,
Some went to Kutch, Bhujj, Kaachho, n' Maathelo,
Some went to Jaisalmir n' Baaharmel,
Some landed in Ajmer with Jarejos,
Some with Chamros n' their brother-like Bhatis
as also with valiant Rajars,
Dodo brought his forces right into Wigahkot,
He issued rations for both men n' horses,
Like the rest, Sammo nobility too arrived at Soomros'.

Dodo is of the view that throne lies vacant, it needs to be occupied. The poet says:

It's just a couple of days since Bhoongar Rai died.

Bhoongar Rai was their paternal grandfather. Their father had been killed in the war between Toors and Gujjars. Turban has lain untied. Now Dodo and Chanesar are the rightful heirs. So is their sister Princess Baaghi. Chiefs of communities in Sindh have received letters of Dodo. They have arrived in Wigahkot at his invitation. They enquire:

Well, Dodo, why have you asked us here?

Dodo enlightens them. The nobles hold consultations among themselves. Faqeer narrates in verse.

Between them the chiefs decided,
Dodo is born of a full-blooded Soomro mother,
Whereas Chanesar's is of ironsmith descent,
Turban should be given to Dodo Rai,
Whose head is more deserving.

This's what a Saalik* has said:

O Qazi, stay with the legitimate,
He wouldn't abuse even when inflamed,
Ever be with them who're truly of noble birth.

(*Literally 'traveller'. A soofi who experiences 'inward deepening or ebbing of the finite self in the direction of its Divine Principle' is a Saalik.—Tr.)

'Dodo is truly of noble birth. He's fit for the turban.' This was the whispering in the gathering. Chanesar heard it. He thought: 'Dodo will tie the turban even when I'm the elder one. It'll rankle. I should go out somewhere, and return after Dodo has tied the turban and the community chiefs have departed.' So he left for the forest of Bakaar (a dense forest in Nangar Parkar) on the excuse of a hunt. A servant told Dodo that Chanesar, displeased, had gone to the Bakaar forest on a horseback. Dodo thought: 'Tayammum (dry ablutions for Islamic prayer) is not allowed when water is available. Elder one is there. Even as the community elders tie the turban around my head, I should tie the turban around Chanesar's head in their presence and before their eyes.' This is what distinguishes

noble genes. Dodo left the assembly, and wrote a letter in secrecy for Chanesar to come back. Faqeer recounts a verse.

Dodo Rai wrote a conciliatory letter,
Bro., this seat, this turban rightfully becomes you,
Come n' seat yourself on the bedstead, my elder brother,
Come, let's we two brothers have conciliation between ourselves,
What the community can do to me!

Chanesar opened the letter and after reading it blessed Dodo:

Praise be to our dad, whose son you're,
Bless the mother who gave birth to you,
Hazrat Shah Gilani is your guide in perplexity,*
This fortress of Wigah is protected by Qaadir,*
May it always be safe from adverse winds,
You'll never have to face any untoward vicissitude,
Now you're my brother n' also dad,
Now what can the community do to me!

[*Syed Abdul Qaadir of Gilaan (1078-1166 CE), who is venerated by Sunni Muslims all over the world as Piraan Pir, ie. 'Sultan of the Saints'or the foremost religious master. He is entitled 'Shaikh Ghaus-e Azam'.—Tr.]

Chanesar mounted his horse and rode to the royal court. But no one, not even a lowly person, came forward to take the reins as he dismounted, because community chiefs weren't happy with him. Dodo noticed their displeasure. He jumped to his feet to take the reins, thinking, 'He's older, I should show him respect.' Whispers went through the assembly: 'Brothers have made up. We've been shown up without cause.'

Fifty-turn turban arrives on a gold tray

Chanesar entered the court. Dodo sent this Faqeer 'to have the turban carried here so that I may place it on Chanesar's head.' Musical instruments play in greeting of the turban and Faqeer narrates, intoning.

As bugles of bravery blare, drums beat,

Woodwinds blow, strings strike,
Five score verse singing minstrels and bards herald
Arrival of the fifty-turn turban borne on a gold tray,
First loving turn to the turban is given by Dodo Rai,
Well, Sir, the king-to-be is not sensible,
Lady luck doesn't seem to favour him,
Throne would've been his but for Lucifer's mischief,
'I'll tie the turban after consulting my dear mom.'

Unties the turban

The turban was sent for. Musical instruments were played in jubilation. The fifty-turn turban was brought on a gold tray.

Well, when the turban arrived, what did Dodo do? Holding the uppermost end of the turban he wound a couple of its turns around Chanesar's head, saying, "*In the name of Allah. Tie the turban. May it ever adorn your head.*'

But Satan inside Chanesar made him double minded. How so?

'Community and clans, locals and outsiders, ministers and advisers, all want Dodo to wear the turban. Dodo wants me to wear it. Now I should ask a well-wisher of mine whether I should wear it or not.'

That's what he thought. While thinking it, he made up his mind: *'It has to be my relative; none else but my own mother, who has given birth to me. I haven't even asked her if I should tie the turban. I should go and ask her now, and retie the turban if she permits.*'

So he untied the turban.

The assembly spoke up: *"Dodo, we have already voiced our doubts. One who seeks his mother's consent to tie the turban, how can he win a war if it is waged tomorrow!"*

Chanesar's mother, though of ironsmith Gujjar family,

was a sensible woman.

At that moment playing of musical instruments in jubilation stopped. The queen directed her maid, *"Go see why jubilant music has stopped."* And Faqeer recounts in verse.

As bugles stop their blares n' drums their beats,
Wise old lady directs her maid Lakhhmaan,*
"Hurry up, find out, lest brothers clash over turban?"

*[*Name of the chief maid of the Wigahkot royalty]*

As Chanesar made a move to go see his mother, Dodo accosted him:

Chanesar, you're now as wise as burning coals,
Hot anvils have scorched you,
Children, going out to play, don't ask their mother,
One who dismounts a throne won't ever remount it,
Time is now, else you'll be wringing your hands.

"When small children go out to play, they don't ask their mothers' permission. You're getting kingship. You're being enthroned. What are you doing, Chanesar?"

Chanesar didn't pay any heed. He went to the royal ladies' residency. The maid came out on the double. Seeing Chanesar distraught, she asked after his condition. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Come on, Soomro lord, you aren't forbidden to smile,
You look like a withered flower n' shed bloody tears,
Has Dodo lord or some other Soomro noble told you off?

Maid wanted to know, *"Have you had a telling-off from Prince Dodo or some other Soomro chief?"*

Poor Sassui* has said, *'It was my own doing. How can I blame Kechis*? If I hadn't slept, Punhoon* wouldn't have gone.'*

[*All three are characters in a folktale. Sassui, a Sindhi washer-girl, and Punhoon, a Baloch prince from Kech, are married for love. They live in Bhambhore, Sassui's hometown. Punhoon's brothers, displeased with the match as being beneath their royal

status, arrive there one day and carry him back to Kech after drugging him and Sassui to sleep. Shah Lateef, the poet laureate of Sindh, has devoted about one sixth of his poetic magnum opus, the Risalo, to Sassui.—Tr.]

To her question, Chanesar replies. Faqeer recounts in verse.

In front is a swift river, behind a burning blaze,
If I step into water, river drowns me,
If I step back, the blaze burns me,
O maid, may the earth open up n' swallow me.

'My labours have been of no avail in the Lord's Court'

The maid hurried inside to congratulate the princess, mother of Chanesar: *"Milady, Chanesar has come. He's untied the turban, and come to residency gate to seek your permission."*

Princess lamented: "My God, he's lost what was won!" So she had this to tell her son. Faqeer intones a verse.

Before you're born, I sought blessings of holy men n' living saints,
Prayed at shrines of dead saints,
Happily suffered the pain of bearing you in my womb for ten months,
Now it seems all my labours have been of no avail in the Lord's court,
You, son, were born by the grace of Spiritual Guide,
I fed you in diapers butter on the point of sword,
So that you may grow up big n' strong,
For greatness of you grownups lies in waging wars,
Crossing swords is the occupation, field and crop of we Samaats,
Now sell your horses n' get yourself a flock of sheep,
While your sheep graze by Indus banks,
You roam about with lambs on your shoulders,
A red cane in your hand, act weak n' frail, son,
Your mom will work for monthly wages in the court of Dodo,
We'll live by selling butter milk.

"Herdsmen do so, my dear. Kings and princes don't do so."

Now what could Chanesar say?

The damsel told that male, "I'm Chanesar's sister, he's my brother"

The better half of Chanesar is also sitting with a group of her lady friends. They tell her, "Your winning husband is at the gate of the residency."

The wife came out and spoke to her mother-in-law. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Aunty, have a poati[1] dyed for my husband to wear,
We two of afore would now become three.
Send for carpenters n' other artisans of Wigahkot,
Have them saw out spinning wheels of sandal-wood n' ivory,
Have bundles of yarn brought from Jaisalmir,
We used to spin hardly quarter of a seer[2] before,
Now it would be more than a seer,
That's what Chanesar has won, aunty,
He would now be a drain on the house.

[[1]Cotton sheet worn by females in the Subcontinent to cover their heads and breasts. [2]A measure of weight equal to about 2 lbs.—Tr.]

The princess continues: "Men seek men's advice, women that of women. You should've come wearing the turban after consulting a man. But you didn't tie the turban. What do you want now?" To her mother-in-law: "Aunty, have a poati dyed for my husband to wear! Had he been a man, he would've come wearing the turban. He's a woman like us, fit for a chuni; should work in cool shades now. Have a spinning wheel made for him to spin yarn."

Chanesar was at fault. He couldn't respond. Matter had slipped out of his hands. Princess addresses him again. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Hubby is soft in company,
Let him now munch dry grain,
Riches have left the handsome,
Money has been swindled off him,
Son would collect wounds sitting at home,
Holding handle of a ladle.

"Because he would neither wage war nor tie the turban nor face cannon."

Before Chanesar could respond, the princess speaks again. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Though soft in company, hubby is hard in eating,
Even when he's a maund of carrots in his loin cloth,*
He seeks whereabouts of the whole field,
Son would collect wounds sitting at home,
As a beam, a rafter falls upon him.

[*About 80 lbs.]

Chanesar didn't reply. The taunts are tormenting the brave-heart. Letting her set red-lead sprinkled hair loose, Princess Maryam* resumes, the sheen of her gold-embroidered velvets fading. Faqeer expresses in verse.

Without our hubbies we're hapless,
May our saint protect our chastity,
I'm Chanesar's sister, he's my brother,
God Himself k. ows I'll never share bed with him,
Now, Bro. Chanesar Soomro, you ought not to stay put.

[*Name of Chanesar's wife.]

Chanesar takes his grievance to Delhi

Princess changes her sandal-wood, musk and attar perfumed silks to black wear [*According to Dr. Baloch, wearing black is not a Soomro custom.*- Tr.] and accosts Chanesar, who is so inflamed that his feet begin to burn and his head to smoke. Faqeer expresses in verse.

Maryam, don't blame me,
You've hurt me to the core,
I'm to lodge my complaint at Delhi with Aladin,
To have my brother hung on spears,
To see his blood with my own eyes,
To have Soomros' Sindh laid to waste,
To fling realms into grief n' mourning.

Having vent his spleen on the princess, the brave-heart left in anger to make preparations. He gets ready, collects arms and ammunition. Faqeer expounds in verse.

Chanesar Rai is incensed, his face set in hard lines,
Donning a golden cloak he arms himself with daggers n' knives,
Picks up a long spear for timely use,
Nangar, still very young, rocks in a cradle,*
He comes n' lifts his son onto his hip,
Kisses him shedding bitter tears,
"Sweet Nangar, everyone bears the loss of a dead relative,
But a living one's separation is unbearable,
If I ever return to Wigah, it would be for you, my boy!"

He didn't bid farewell to anyone in Wigahkot save Nangar, who was born thirteen days before*.

[*Traditions have it that Chanesar's son Nangar was the first Soomro dynast to embrace martyrdom. If so, he could not have been so young when his father was preparing to go for Delhi's help unless of course he grew up in the inordinately long time (14 years, according to some traditions) his father took to bring the invading force. But then 14 years is too long a time for a person's resentment to keep smoldering. Traditions also have it that he was sent as emissary to dissuade his father from going to Delhi. How could a few weeks old infant act as an emissary? He, a mid-teens boy, could fight a full scale war because he had giants' blood in his genes. Discounting the age and cradle part would make the Tale a little more neat, wouldn't it?-- Tr.]

What're they doing in his absence? Wining is on the rise. Everyone is making Dodo drunk by offering him cups filled from large pitchers. The turban has been tied around Dodo's head. He hasn't tied it himself because he had proclaimed, "Dry ablution is not permissible when water is available. I won't tie the turban when my elder brother is there."

This's what they did when the elder brother was gone.

Kettledrums were beaten to announce, 'Dodo will reign.'

Chanesar heard.

There were two brothers. Third was their sister, Princess Baaghi. She thought, 'Community chiefs came. Brothers became estranged. Chanesar is going away, in anger. Dodo is unaware. I should better tell Dodo that Chanesar is going

away, displeased.'

Princess informs her brother. Faqeer renders in verse:

Baaghi came weeping, hugged her brother,
"Dodo, how can you rest on bedspread with your legs stretched out?
You've no inkling of your brother's passing by your side,
Dear prince departs, leaving Sindh desolate."

Princess Baaghi cries out: "Mighty Dodo, how can you be so unconcerned!"

Now Chanesar, having left in ager, has come to Lakhhi Garden, where he dismounts. Sword is his prop. Horse is sedate. There is a river-wave inside him, 'What has happened?'

Saaliks have said:

We've never seen a sensible brave.

A brave man doesn't have much sense. If he's sensible, how can he do justice to his bravery!

Tnus Chanesar is in waves.

Hither Dodo awoke. Saw the turban on his head. 'I don't know who placed the turban on my head. The turban's being on my head is now fait accompli. It can't be removed.' Seeing the community chiefs in front, he shouted:

Is there one to go n' bring my brother back?
I'll give him much gold and remove irons,
He can laugh n' consume these granaries and estates.

No one responded.

Contest between Chanesar and Haalaanis

Hyder is the name. He's seven sons. Their only prayer to God is: O Sustainer of Worlds, have Dodo or Chanesar go on a hunt or wrestle with us. We'll kill one and snatch the turban from the other. They jumped to their feet and said, "Brave

Dodo, permit us to bring him back."

"You have my permission, brothers."

"We've a request."

"Yes?"

"Should we bring him gently or forcibly?"

"Suit yourselves."

Having received the go ahead, they departed happily. Faqeer renders in verse.

The seven Soomro brothers, all young n' sturdy,
Untied their greyhounds n' rode their horses,
Asked every watchman, "Where's Chanesar Rai?"
"There he is, Chanesar Soomro, brother of Dodo",
"We've come in the name of God with humble solicitation,
We're on a mission sanctified by the holy name of Mustafa,*
Do not turn us back empty handed,
One who honours a deputation of brothers is never faulted".

[*A honorific title of the Prophet of Islam^{SAIW}. —Tr.]

When they presented the mission before him, Chanesar told them, "You've mentioned so holy a name that my being, which is stronger and harder than stone, has turned softer than wax and butter. But if you want to take me with you in any case, then take me by force, otherwise I won't budge at all."

It was what they wanted, a fight. Chanesar was weaponless. All seven of them made a lunge for him with unsheathed swords. Chanesar slapped them so hard that they looked like a year old corpses. Faqeer renders in verse.

All seven of the Haalaanis charged in a row,
Hit by slaps, none moved n' gave up the ghost, writhing,
All were stacked like hay by a farmer.

The court guard informed Dodo, "Chanesar has killed all seven of mighty youths."

Dodo comes soliciting to Chanesar

When he heard what had happened, Dodo thought: 'He's son of my father n' my elder brother. I should myself call upon him. He may relent, may not go."

Dodo undertakes his mission of solicitation. Faqeer renders in verse.

I've come in the name of God with humble solicitation,
Mine is a mission sanctified by the holy name of Mustafa,
Spurn not what is solicited in the holy name of Muhammad[SAW],
As God is my witness, I've betrothed Soni (to your son),*
Come, my dear brother, seat yourself on the bedstead,
Come, let's reconcile. What community chiefs can do to me!

[*Name of Dodo's daughter, who was betrothed to Chanesar's son Nangar.]

"Chanesar don't go peeved at community chiefs' talk. The turban that I have worn will not be removed. I've paid the fine of wearing it by betrothing my daughter to your son. Secondly, come and run the government yourself."

After hearing what Dodo has said, Chanesar responds. Faqeer renders in verse:

You have given Soni now, you'll offer Saaraan next,*
I'm taking my grievance to Aladin in Delhi,
Dodo, you'll realize when your principal queen
Is whisked away from under your nose."

[*Second daughter of Dodo, who was given away, as per family tradition,to Mohammed Soomro,son of the sister of Dodo and Chanesar. —Tr.]

"I've taken only two steps and you've offered one of your daughters. If I go forward, you'll offer another. I'll not step back till I have brought Aladin and made him carry away your queen".

The beseeching brave did not like what he heard. His moustaches fluttered. Moustaches of Dodo flutter. Faqeer renders in verse.

Get out of my sight, you son of an ironsmith,
Else holding your loins under my leg I'll rend you to death,
Have that father of yours invade n' offer him your ironsmith mother,
Your bow is seven-stringed, do what you want with it,
Have your Pathan bring enough grain and grass for my horses.*

[*Alauddin Khilji]

[*Note:* Chanesar's response and Dodo's retort are at variance not only with the norms of decency so sacrosanct in the art of Tale-Telling but also out of character with the intrinsic nobility of the two dynasts.- Tr.]

He dared him with a fierce stare.

Chanesar proceeded on.

It is said that a strongman isn't ruffled easily, but when he is, he isn't calmed easily.

Chanesar meets a cattleman in the country of Abul Abro and fights a lion

Presently he thought of taking some rest, feeding and resting the horse. As he went a few steps farther, he saw fresh manure and fresh cattle pens but no humans.

Where there is no human, there is no grain or water.

He turned his horse. When he was gone some distance, his ears caught a sound. What of? A reed-pipe's.

'Some man is blowing it,' he thought.

He turned his horse and saw eight buffaloes, one calf, and tenth a baffaloherd playing a reed-pipe. Chanesar accosted him with "Salamalekum." [Peace to you]

"Walekumsalam." [Peace to you also]

He looked at Chanesar. He saw a strongman.

Chanesar inquires: "My good man, you're the only person I've come across hereabouts, no other man, cattle, or something. Why so?"

Glancing at Chanesar, the buffalo-herd tells about his native place. Faqeer recounts it in verse.

There wasn't shortage of camels, cows were aplenty,
Nor were sheep scarce, wheat crop flourished,
Then a wild lion came crouching, terrorized the whole land,
This country is of Abul Abro, be informed, pal.

"Lions came drifting in the hill torrent, devoured men and cattle, ran away."

"You?"

"I am a cattleman. This here is a wasteland. I am grazing cattle tactfully, just passing time. What goes with you?" Cattleman asked.

Chanesar said, "I'm a Daayo*." He felt ashamed of calling himself Soomro.

[* 'Daayo' is masculine of the Sindhi word 'daai', which means midwife as well as governess or house keeper. In keeping with the Subcontinental practice of being known after ones' calling, 'Daayo' is also a caste. —Tr.]

Cattleman eyed him closely, and said, "You're a Daayo. No, you aren't a Daayo." Faqeer recounts in verse.

Socks on your feet are worth lakh n' quarter,
Dress on your body is embellished with jewels,
Tied round your waist is band of honour,
Plume on your head sparkles with pearls,
You're a ruler of a realm or a commander of soldiers.

"You're a monarch, not a Daayo."

He said, "No, buddy, no, Dodo the Brave has had me wear all these."

Cattleman said, "You seem to be a monarch. You're out hunting, separated from your army, come farther, or left in anger. You aren't a Daayo, but a monarch."

Hungry and thirsty, Chanesar asked the cattleman,

"Please get me some milk to drink."

The other said, "Milk? No sheep or goat here; I could have held her leg up to milk her for you. Wait for sundown. Come to the cowshed. Many milkful bowls there."

"No, I want it now."

Both were on different tacks.

Cattleman said at last, "My buffalo hasn't had milk-drawing feed today. She's is a eight watcher. There she is. Milk her if you can, or take her away. Just don't bother me".

Cattleman turned the buffalo over to the brave. Patting her back, Chanesar got ready to milk her. Faqeer intones a verse.

He's caressing the black horn-twisted,
Holding her hip tight, he drew her near,
"Buddy, get me a bowl from the container,
I don't know how to milk, I might tear her teats out".

Clasping her teat, he pressed it so hard that milk gushed out into the bowl..

"I don't know how to milk. I might pluck out her teat. You milk her for me, cattleman."

Cattleman began to milk for Chanesar to drink. When the latter had had his fill, the buffalo had no more milk left in her. Removing the bowl from his lips, he mumbled, "Forgive me, God". Though so strong, he was God-fearing. He thought: 'Chanesar, you've left your own homeland in anger, in chagrin. If you've drawn the milk without affection, with force and violence, God will not forgive you for it.' So he comforts, cheers her up. Faqeer says this in verse.

He's caressing the black horn-twisted,
Go early to graze the riverbank grass over there,
I'll kill that lion or he'll kill me,

I may free the land from this terror or sacrifice myself.

'Dear buffalo, I've drawn your milk by force. God willing, I'll kill the lion and gift you the forest. Then you can graze there without fear. But if the lion kills me, those back home will be pleased.'

He asked the cattleman, "Have you seen the lion?"

"Yes, I've."

"What size?"

"As large as the young of a big buffalo."

"When does he raid, night or day"?

"Raids at night, spends the day sleeping on a wood frame'.

"Okay, take me there".

Cattleman took Chanesar where the lion rested, and stood himself seventy steps away. Unarmed strongman is to challenge the lion. Faqeer renders this in verse.

Get up, son of cat, shake off sleep,
Daayo of Dodo calls you, come here,
He stood up like the lion that he was,
Sending the earth atremble,
Uprooting the riverbank grasses and bushes.

Strongman called the lion son of cat. Cat is an irritant for a lion. Who can call him cat! Strongman didn't hold any weapon, was unarmed.

When the lion heard himself being called cat, he jumped some seven feet above the wood frame he was lying on and landed on his paws. He saw Chanesar but kept his distance, saying, "Yea, I'm a cat for whoever has called me cat." He stood rooted where he was.

Strongman challenged the lion once again: "Come on. I am letting you have the first hit lest you die thinking 'if I'd the

chance I'd have killed him.'"

Thus challenged, the lion rushed, his head lowered. Faqeer intones a verse:

Lion came roaring like thunderstorm,
Struck out with his head
In a powerful soar aimed at the other's head,
Who would've died but for the steel helmet,
Which suffered the impact n' broke into pieces,
As the lion landed, he raised his paw to hit again,
But mighty told him, "No, brother, no.
You've had your turn, now it's mine."
Remembering Hazrat Shah, mighty hit out,
His hands clenched in a fist,
A single blow smashed the lion's brain,
As the carnivore fell unconscious,
Mighty placed his foot firmly on the carcass
N' tore all its limbs apart one after the other.

As Chanesar stood up after doing what he had promised the black horn-twisted buffalo to do, the cattleman, who was close by, told him, "Mighty, our king has announced that he who kills the carnivore single-handed would be rewarded handsomely. Come with me, I'll get you your reward."

Mighty replied, "No. my good man, no. You get and enjoy that reward. Only two, you and God, saw the fight. Goodbye now."

"Why not tell who you really are, brother? You're not a Daayo, of that I'm sure."

"Well, If you insist I'll tell you," said Chanesar. "Now listen."

What Chanesar told Cattleman, Faqeer intones in verse.

Sammos n' Soomros, both are of the realm of Nangar,
Grandsons of Bhoongar reside in Wigahkot,

Dodo and Chanesar, both are known as sons of Dodo,
Brothers have fallen apart over throne,
Rai is estranged from his tribe,
I'm called Chanesar in Wigahkot.

Chanesar rides on

Cattleman was silenced, and picking up ears and tail of the lion he went his way. So did Chanesar Rai.

Remembering Hazrat Shah, the groom mounted his horse,
As he let the reins of his red spotted mount go lax,
The thoroughbred shook himself and went into canter.

*

First stage of his journey ends in Umarkot,
His going away in displeasure is a great misfortune for brothers.

*

His second halt is Jaisalmir,
Chanesar is going away, incensed,
Brothers have quarreled,
N' become each other's foe.

*

As he rode through wilderness on third leg of his travel,
Night fell forcing him to camp under a mahogany.

On that tree were perched two birds, who began to talk with each other. One said to the other, "Anything new, bro?" The other replied, "Yea, there's. However far we go, we always come back to our nest here. That man down there is unlucky Chanesar. He's left his home and family and is on his way to get an invading force against his homeland." "Will he get it?" the other asked. "Yea, he would but after a lot of bother provided he breaks and carries a stick from this tree." Chanesar had heard the birds talk. Next morning he resumed his journey after doing what the bird had advised. Faqeer tells in verse how he did it.

Mighty unsheathed his cutter,
N' tried to sever a stalk of the

Mahogany he had slept under,
As he failed in his first attempt, he thought,
'My cutter is lightning-tempered by a master,
It can cut stones into slices n' slit iron too',
So he fell upon the stalk in inflamed scourge,
After cutting n' peeling it, he shaped it into a sturdy stick,
A load of ten seers.*
[*Equal to about 20 lbs. or 09 kgs. —Tr.]

--- kills a cannibal

As he proceeded he came to a four-way. He didn't know Delhi. He thought he was lost. He saw some riders coming. He decided to ask them the way to Delhi. Of the four ways, two did lead to Delhi, one was shorter and the other longer. Because the shorter one was a cannibal's haunt, the longer one had been made as a detour.

The riders were courtiers of King Aladin. When they saw him, they reined in their horses. 'If we're not mistaken, the cannibal to avoid whom we detour seems atop a horse today', they whispered, for they hadn't ever seen a giant of a man like him before.

Chanesar raised his hand and asked, "Brothers, which way goes to Delhi?"

"The one you're standing on," they told him.

"Where have you come from?"

"We're coming from Delhi."

"Why have you come by this way?"

"A cannibal waylays on the other. We've, therefore, built a detour."

"Well, I'll go that way. I and the cannibal will waylay each other."

As God Almighty had willed, the ogre hadn't had his

food for straight seven days. So he was on the lookout for it.

Suddenly Chanesar appears. Cannibal is aware. Chanesar turns his horse back. Cannibal calls out. Faqeer tells this in verse.

Daily fare is in God's power,
It's He who feeds all creatures,
Fires of huger have been blazing for seven days,

"You, my feed, have appeared after seven days. You can't run away," he shouted.

Chanesar thought: 'When a man goes wrong, he becomes a man-eater. You've killed a lion with a fist. How can you run away from a man!' So he turned his horse and asked the cannibal., "What did you say?"

"I said, you're my feed. God Almighty has sent you after seven days. I won't let you go back!"

"So I'm your feed n' you'd kill me?"

"Yea, I'd"

"Okay. I've these weapons. This is a twenty-arrow bow, this is a sword, and this is a spear. But I won't hit with any of these."

"If you won't use any weapon, how would you fight?"

"I place hands on my head," Chanesar told him, "you squeeze me by your utmost force. If you can kill me, eat me and have your ancient mother in on the feed. But if I'm not killed, then consider your days to be over."

Chanesar places his hands on his head. The cannibal puffs himself up, and putting his arms around Chanesar squeezes him in a violent embrace.. The armour covering Chanesar's chest presses against the cannibal's chest. His sweat trickles down into and out of his socks. He disengages

his hands and says, "You said you won't use any weapon, why this one then? Take it off as I can't use my full strength because of it."

Chanesar said, 'Let me first use equal strength, then I'll take it off."

Thus Chanesar gets his turn. Faqeer describes this in verse.

Remembering Hazrat Shah, the giant hugged n' squeezed,
Cannibal's ribs broke, his spine snapped,
He croaked, his croak came out in speech,
"You cheat, you've killed by deceit, without warning,
You're Dodo Soomro or a real brother of Dodo."

"I can think of no one else. You're either Chanesar or Dodo. None else could've killed me except one of them. If you'd told of your being Chanesar or Dodo, I would've left these parts and sung your praises all my life".

Fight with a crazy camel

Mighty moved on.

A herd of Aladin's camels is grazing. Faqeer describes in verse.

A herd of Aladin's she-camels is grazing in a pen,
Camel-man standing at the pen shouts,
"Run to find safety, else, horse rider, you'd be killed."

"Run," camel-man warned him, "crazy camel is on the rampage."

Chenesar halted his horse and asked, "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that if the camel smells you, you and your horse would both die."

"Is it for the camel alone to kill or killing the camel is

also allowed," Canesar wanted to know.

"If you can kill that camel, we'll pray for the wellbeing of your progeny," camel-man replied. "That camel is so bad that he doesn't let us milk any of our she-camels."

Camel becomes aware. He attacks Chanesar with both his forelegs raised. Faqeer describes in verse.

Crazed camel comes in to attack, his nostrils flaring violently,
Intrepid hurled mahogany stick, which went through the hump,
Fell him down with a thump, fore forward n' hind aft.

Mighty turned his horse and dismounted to look for the stick he had cut midway. Picking it, he came up the flank and hit the prostrate body right in the middle with such force that it split into two parts as if a sword had bisected raw thread.

Fight with a demon near Delhi

He went on and reached Delhi. He looked at its pinnacles. Faqeer describes in verse.

He saw pinnacles of Delhi n' its gate,
Children were playing marbles nearby,
Taking one by arm, he asked,
"Say why is there weeping in this vicinity?"

As he came closer, he heard sound of weeping, which made his care-worn heart more pensive.

"What's the trouble, boy?"

Boy was sensible. He noticed that the man before him was strong looking, so he decided to tell him what was troubling his native place. Faqeer tells it in verse.

A demon is afflicting the town of Delhi,
He's gobbled up a lakh n' quarter,*
Today is turn of this house,

Mother is weeping for her son.

[*One hundred and twent-five thousand.]

Boy told him what was happening, "Since you want to know, strong-man, so listen. Seat of Aladin's reign is stricken with a demon. No fight has finished him off. So each house has to provide a person by turns. This house belongs to a widow. Her husband died some time ago. She has brought up her only son. Today it is her house's turn. Poor widow is lamenting for her son."

He mused: 'Chanesar, if you went and complained. Lakhs would march from here and lakhs from there. You'll have lakhs killed. No one will speak well of you. Now lay down your life in the way of God so that your progeny is made proud and happy.'

He rides to and dismounts in front of the widow's house. Faqeer recounts in verse.

"Dear mom, let me have a sip of water to drink";
"Son, you haven't filled up any water that you want to drink,
There are many wells in Delhi n' plenty of inns,
Also outhouses of nobles where grain, water n' grass are provided.

"I haven't filled any water for you."

Chanesar saw that she hadn't understood. He should ask for water again. Faqeer describes in verse.

"Dear mom, give me a quart of water in the name of Allah,
I'll give away my head for your son, as God is my witness";
She comes up gently, greets with a smile n' says, "Come in",
She ropes the horse in and gives him grass, then
Lays a cot for the rider with a fine bed thereon.

Woman got up, stopped crying, took reins of the horse, laid out a bed becoming a noble, tied up the horse, fore and aft. She mused: 'He is sacrificing his life for my son. It behoves me to feed him.' There was nothing in the house

except a neck ornament of silver which she had acquired by doing some spinning work. She takes that to a grosser. Faqeer narrates in verse.

> *Removing her ornament, woman takes it to a grosser,*
> *"Grosser, let me have some fine flour, a noble is at my house";*
> *She sets out dishes of delicious curry n' spiced rice before her guest.*

A fare befitting a chief.

She asked him, "Where are you from?"

"I'm from Sindh" was the answer. He spoke no more. After consuming the food, he went to sleep.

The son was away bidding last goodbyes to his friends and pals: "Well, my friends, farewell. Tomorrow I'll be in the mouth of the demon. Do forgive me for my omissions n' commissions."

He came home. When he had left, his mother had been cryin_. On return he didn't hear any such sound. 'When I was leaving earlier in the day,' he mused, 'mother was crying. She is quiet now. Can't say why.' As he went inside, he saw a man sleeping and a horse tethered.

"Who is he?" He inquired.

"Son, he's your brother. You weren't born, when he had gone to Soomros' Sindh, displeased. He asked me not to cry for he would sacrifice himself for you as he has already done much travelling and seen enough".

The boy was surprised: 'What a fine brother he is. No sooner does he arrive than he decides to give his life for me.' He told his mother, "Let's awaken him. I want to talk with him."

"No, don't awaken him. He's come from some remote land. He's giving away his head for a loaf."

Chanesar was awake. He had suffered many taunts lately, this was one more, so what! He began to snore.

At this juncture Aladin's soldiers appeared and demanded, "Woman, let us have your son."

Woman tells them to wait and goes up to awaken Chanesar. Faqeer tells it in verse.

Wake up, valiant of Sindh, Aladin's soldiers have shown up,
Do keep the promise that you've made, son.

On hearing this, he started to snore more loudly. Widow saw that it might now be her own son, and this man, having consumed her neck ornament, was snoring. Seeing this, she wanted to reproach him. Faqeer narrates in verse.

You're a false from a false land, you made false promises,
You've put Soomros' Sindh to shame, Dodo Rai must know.

She called out, "You're snoring after promising, son. Soldiers of Aladin have come. Wake up and face them."

Chanesar thinks: 'Bravo, Dodo, bravo. Men have Dodo on their lips, and, oddly enough, women too have Dodo on their lips.' He rose from his bed with so violent a jerk that all its four posts became loose and the cot broke up.

The soldiers that had come went back to Aladin.

"Why have you come empty handed?" the king inquired, "Why haven't you brought the widow's son with you?"

They replied, "We couldn't, Sire. The destruction in Delhi is all due to that widow. She has the demon staying in her house. He wasn't waking. So she roused him with pinches. When he did rise, all the four posts of the cot came loose and it broke. He's very strong. Each of his eyes is as large as a bowl."

King Aladin looked at his ministers and courtiers and said, "One who eats humans won't stay with humans. Go see

and bring the widow's son also."

They went again. "Woman, hand over your son."

Chanesar asked them, "What do you want, guys?"

"Not you."

"Who then?"

"That widow, we want her son."

"He is not coming."

"Who else would come?"

"I."

"Come on, let's go."

They brought him to the arena and tied him securely to an upright steel post. Then closed all the gates of Delhi and went their various ways. He Told himself: 'Well, Chanesar, you let them tie you up. What'll you do now?' Mouthing "Aili Aili". he took hold of the sturdy steel post, and exerting full force pulled it out of the ground· the chain he was tied with, that too he snapped link by link.

It is night, he notes. Unsheathing his sword, he fixes it into the ground for support and goes to sleep. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Salinity is enemy of fort, net of fish,
Shark is enemy of smaller fish, falcon of birds,
Sleep is enemy of men, makeup of women.

He woke up.

Demon appeared and approached the spot, where they tied his feed, human beings, to the post. There wasn't any post or a human being. As he looked around, he espied Chanesar, who was reclining against his sword. Demon made a sudden lunge. There ensued a contest. Faqeer describes in verse.

Demon came at midnight like thunderstorm,

Soomro sent his shield spinning at the demon,
Its fierce impact, slashes of his cutlass n' piercings of his spear
Killed the demon, whose lifeless body he pushed back with his palm;
Thus fell on ground with a clap of thunder the one,
Whom the whole hill country feared.

Chanesar noticed that it was a long night. Moving on he saw a sign on which the name of Naamdaar Nazar Baig was written. He thought: 'I've reached the gate of the very person I've to meet.'

He heard some people speaking on other side of the gate. They were guards of Naamdaar Nazar Baig. Chanesar talks with them. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Rampart around this mansion is worth crores,
Gate must have cost a lakh, may be more,
Its locks n' bolts are of every metal, n hinges too,
There in the back are bird nests.

They called out, "This lakh-worth gate that's consumed lakh or more belongs a chief. You're not allowed, so don't come inside."

"Whose house is it that....."

"It's Naamdaar Nazar Baig's house. He has built a high rampart with this thick gate and positioned inside fifty young men for fear of the demon."

Thinking they might take him for the demon, Chanesar puts them at ease. Faqeer tells in verse.

God himself would protect the honour of birds,
I too am son of Adam, I breathe like you,
Don't be so boastful about the lakh-worth, let me enter.

At this Nazar Baig inquired from the interior, "Who is it?"

They told him, "It's [illegible]emon."

He directed them, "You remain vigilant at your post. He can remain outside."

Breaking of lakh-worth gate

Chanesar mused: 'Didn't depend upon God but on a gate. Let's break it so that they are disabused of the idea.' Faqeer recounts in verse.

Mouthing 'Aily Aily'n' placing his shield on head,
Mighty hit the gate with his two palms so violently
that its four posts broke,
Thus *he put an end to fondling of the lakh-worth,*
Their pride in it slackened,
Some ran n' hid themselves under carpets,
Some found sactuary in horse stalls,
Fifty guards in innermost recesses,
They neither coughed or gasped, nor inhaled heavily,
Aladin's noble went n' hid himself in a secret room.

Chanesar entered, saw no one about, began to search. He discovered the noble, Nazar Baig, in his hiding place. When Nazar Baig saw mighty, he said to himself, 'It was me he wanted and has found.' So he complains. Faqeer voices it in verse.

Five shampooers n' fifty guards of mine,
Some ran n' hid under carpets, others in horse stalls,
They're neither coughing and gasping, nor inhaling heavily,
For God's sake, do let poor me live.

Chanesar said to Nazar Baig, "Don't be afraid, brother. I'm a Soomro from Sindh."

"Come out," Nazar Baig ordered his guards. "This here is a Soomro from Sindh."

"Did you kill the demon," he asked Chanesar.

"Yes, I did."

"Have you brought any trophies, like ears and tail?"

"Yes, I've."

Chanesar kills elephant

Four watches of night went by. Sun appeared and began to climb the sky. The gatekeeper unlocked the city gate for the day but seeing the demon out there relocked it quickly. As he did so, the gaahis [a lowly caste of grass growers/reapers] of King Aladin arrived there to go out on their job. They asked the gatekeeper to unlock the gate, which he refused and told them about the demon. They looked out of the narrow slits in the gate and saw the demon lying dead and animals devouring the carcass. So they snatched the keys from the gatekeeper, unlocked the gate and rushed out. Faqeer renders in verse.

Hasan Gaahi goes wild over the dead demon,*
Some gaahis go bathing in the pool of blood,
Others flourish their sickles,
Congratulate the king, gaahis have killed demon.

[*Chief grass-grower/reaper of Aladin.]

After messing with the demon's carcass and collecting a few wounds, the gaahis presented themselves before the king and saluted him. The king stood up to acknowledge their salute.

He said to himself: 'So many chiefs and soldiers with so much weaponry couldn't fight the demon. These gaahis, poor and lowly, have finished him off with their sickles!' He stopped the others' salutes, salaries, and entry.

Gaahis thought, they'd borne much suffering, why not plunder Delhi with permission of King Aladin. So they appeared before the king and presented their request, which was granted and they went on their pillaging spree.

One of the ministers of Aladin was Maandhan Malik. Suffering citizens called on him to complain. He went with them to see Nazar Baig,. What Baig told them, Faqeer recounts in verse.

We're subservient to the king,

Obligated to him for what we're,
He's like a rock, unmoving n' unyielding,
I'll find a way to make him see reason.

"Some way will have to be found to make him relent. He's a rock. We don't have to break our heads."

"You alone know the most tactful way, the best time to approach him," said Maandhan Malik.

"Okay, let us go meet the king."

So they presented themselves before Aladin and saluted him, who didn't acknowledge it. The two saluted again. But it too remained unacknowledged. The king was angry and displeased with Baig for his failure to do "what the lowly unarmed gaahis had done, getting rid of the demon even with all your troops and weapons."

In response to the royal reproach Baig said, "May be, it were the gaahis, who killed the demon. But what about one of your elephants, who went wild and began killing scores every night?"

One day as Chanesar was taking bath, the crazed elephant came by. People warned him

Standing in the open you have rubbed
Fuller's earth on your body off a dish,
Now the crazed elephant is on the rampage,
Run or you will definitely die, blockhead.

"You still have time to run, else the elephant will kill you."

Chanesar looks in the direction of the elephant and makes a reply. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Standing in the open I've rubbed on my body
Fuller's earth off a dish,
Blockhead is your grandfather, your father,

I'm equal of that elephant,
If I die by elephant's trunk,
I will be honoured by my people.

Having said so, he strained his muscles to their limit and flung the dish containing Fuller's earth at the elephant's trunk. Its lower half was severed. He then hit the animal with his stick, which went through the animal and fell on the ground. So did the elephant.

The elephant driver ran back and told the king, "There's a man killed the elephant with a stick."

The blockhead stood in the open rubbing his body with
Fuller's earth off a dish, which and a stick he flung
In quick succession at the elephant, killing it instantly.

Aladin was astonished, "How can an elephant be killed with a dish and a stick?"

Nazar Baig said, "He can be, sire, as the gaahis killed the demon with grass reaping sickles."

Thereupon Aladin said:

Why not bring up such a man,
Who can kill with dishes n' sticks.

"Who is he?"

"He is a Soomro come to petition you."

Chanesar petitions Aladin

"So he's come to petition me. Okay, send for him."

Chanesar is escorted in. He voices his grievance on arrival. Faqeer renders it in verse.

Chanesar, bent upon slander, says,
"Your betrothed has been detained by Dodo Rai".

"When our father was dying, his last wish was: 'Man is mortal. My time is coming to an end. If you form marital alliances, do it with Aladin for he is a monarch as we are.' When I broached the matter, Dodo got annoyed, seized my turban, and detained your betrothed."

On hearing this King Aladin said, "Give him an army for fighting with Dodo."

King Aladin orders his army command. Faqeer tells in verse.

March with five thousand troops, vanquish Dod Rai,
Get Chanesar Rai his turban, n'
Bring me my betrothed here.

When Chanesar heard this he thought, 'Five thousand troops are fiddlesticks for Dodo.' So he talks with the king. Faqeer tells in verse.

Have your five thousand troops in the field,
As God is my witness,
I'll beat them to death.
No arms, just with my bare hands.

"You're having five thousand to march on Dodo. He is a mighty. Fifty lakh will have to be fielded to vanquish him."

On hearing this Aladin withdrew his orders and lost interest in Chanesar and his problem, who could do nothing but wait for the king to relent. His wait stretched out to fourteen years, during which he lodged with none else than Naamdaar Nazar Baig.

*

[Among the 49 accounts of the Tale of Dodo-Chanesar compiled by Dr. Baloch in his two-volume work, one is a narrative by Ghulam Husain Kalhoro. His version of the episodes about the killing of demon and elephant by Chanesar and his meeting with King Aladin is substantially different from that of Dost Ali's given above. It is reproduced hereunder in translation, bracketed and edited so as to stress the point made by Dr. Baloch as to why such differences of detail occur, and also because it makes better sense than that of the other. —Tr.]

{Chanesar rode into the fort of Delhi and began trotting through the streets. At noon, he saw an inn being run by a woman. He paid five coins to the owner and lodged there. After having his lunch, he went to sleep. While he was sleeping, a messenger came to inform the innkeeper that it was her son's turn that night to be gobbled up by the demon. As soon as she heard it, she fell down with a loud cry and began to lament. Her weeping awakened Chanesar, who asked her why was she crying. She told him between piteous sobs.

My only child, a son, is to be the demon's feed tonight,
I'll offer myself in his place but women aren't accepted,
I would buy a substitute with money but none is available,
I mourn for my innocent son, who is going to die without cause.

Chanesar's heart melted. He raised the lady to her feet and said:

"Mother, in the name of God I offer myself as substitute for your son,
Let me have a piece of white cloth first, then
Take me to the site for I know not where it is";
So he was conducted to the Bloody Gate, where after
Greetings he inquired about the time the demon came,
He was told: "A drizzle precedes his thunder-storm like arrival,
We'll tie you tight to a post, then you can see for yourself";
When they went back after tying him to the post,
The Soomro squared his shoulders and snapped all his bonds,
Making a scarecrow of the white cloth he fixed it on the Bloody Gate,
As dawn broke, the demon came rumbling,
The brave remembered Ali the Lion and squared his shoulders again,
Judging the time n' distance right he hurled his stick,
Putting his whole body into the throw,
The demon, tall n' sturdy like a pinnacle that he was,
Went down by the grace of Provident,
But no citizen of Delhi dared come and watch.

After killing the demon, Chanesar stood him against outer side of the rampart wall.

Then Chanesar Soomro went back to his lodging at the inn
To await an opportunity to see and present his complaint to the king ;
When morn had chased the dewy darkness away n' birds chirped,
Hundred gaahis came trumpeting to do their job,
All ran helter-skelter on seeing the demon standing against the wall.
Hasan Malik, who had fallen while running, looked back and saw
Crows at the eyes plucking with beaks n' may be a dead cockroach,
He called out to his companions, "Let's fight the demon to death,"
So they came back and, led by Hasan, began to hack madly with sickles,
Demon's blood flowed in streams, which they filled in a jar and took it
To Aladin, who, pleased to see it, rewarded Malik and his men
With bestowal of golden plumes and estates n'
Freed them from the drudgery of growing and reaping grass,
Thus they became elites as Aladin had them seated along side himself,
Promising matrimonial alliance with all expense to be borne by him.
They could plunder the four corner of Delhi also.

Aladin's minister Nazar Baig was out of Delhi at that time.

Nazar Baig wasn't present in Delhi,
He had gone hunting for five days,
When he returned, crying locals told him:
"Delhi is being devastated by gaahis,
Who are robbing the citizens of their possessions,
Aladin doesn't hear, people are migrating";
After hearing them Baig became thoughtful but made no reply.

At the inn, Chanesar said to himself: 'Last night I killed the demon. I should go out and see what people are talking about.'

He bathed and sauntered out, looking like a king,
A woman approached Chanesar lord, and said , crying,
"O Perfect Lord of Fortresses, may you lead armies,

You're roving here alone, there your kith n' kin miss you";
Chanesar: "Who're you, where're you headed, what's your name?"
"I'm 'Wadni' wife of Mohan, native of 'Bangaar, jeweler by caste,
Though I've grown old, I know you of old, you're Chanesar Soomro,
It's you who killed the demon n' freed Delhi from a great affliction,
I'm going to publish this all over Dehli, it was soomro who did it;'
So saying she left without taking the bath she'd intended to take,
She went straight to Naamdaar Nazar Baig, and said to him,
"Take heart, Nazar Baig, hear what I saw with my own eyes,
It was Pince Chanesar Soomro who killed the demon".

*

So pleased was Baig at the news that he laughed in joy,
The noble then comforted and consoled the suffering populace:
"I'll go and see Aladin today n' have it out with him;"
At the King's court he sat on the carpet without saluting him,
Looking at him, the king said, "You've neither saluted me,
Nor offered congratulations on killing of Demon by Hasan,
You've also not sat on a chair, what be the reason of all this?"
Baig responded, "What I say is true, my king,
Only your kith n' kin can sit in chairs in your presence, which I'm not,
You've demeaned yourself by betrothing your daughter to a gaahi,
Gaahis didn't kill the demon before, how come they did it now?"
Aladin called Hasan n' said, "Did you hear, how Baig has blamed me?"
Hasan commented, "They can't bear it, they're raving in jealousy,
Now that demon is dead, they're throwing their weight about,
We've nothing to do with Nazar, you must keep your promise."

*

Looking at Nazar Baig, Aladin told him, "Put the gaahis to test";
Wrapping his hands in a kerchief, Nazar Baig said,
"Let your wild elephant loose, if they can kill him, I'll hold lavish feasts";
King then called Hasan to him, and said, "Go, mighty, kill the elephant,
N' show Baig and nobles your prowess";

Hasan responded, "Elephant kill is no problem, I can fell one easily,
But where is one, I haven't heard of any, nor can one be had for money".
But Baig said, "Rest assured, there'll be one, hurry up, get ready,
If you kill him, I'll pay you plenty in cash and kind."

A drum-beater went through the town proclaiming that a wild elephant was on the loose; all town gates were locked shut.

Elephant, his innards loaded with intoxicants, came onto the arena,
Finding no one there, he began to prance on his hind legs,
Of the gaahis some hid themselves in tall grasses, some in crops;
Their cowardice earned them condemnation n' regress to their sickles.

Meanwhile, Chanesar had come out of his lodging to watch the spectacle of elephant killing.

King-face Chanesar Soomro came along, bathed and spruce,
Elephant groom shouted at him, "Who're you, watch out, you may die,
Whose clothes you wear, whose silks you don, rustic?"
Chanesar said, "I wear my own clothes, I don my own silks,
Rustic is your dad, your grand dad, your mother,
Let the elephant come, don't restrain him,
If I step back, I'll disgrace Dodo;
If I'm killed by elephant , may Dodo brother not die,
May Soomris not become homeless, may Sindh be free of disquiet";
Elephant came trumpeting n' rumbling, and in a headlong rush,
Mighty remembered Ali the Lion, squared his shoulders, dug his feet,
Then judging the distance with his eye, he threw his stick with full force,
The powerful animal collapsed with the impact and died on the spot;
Elephant groom, bareheaded n' lamenting, went n' fell before Aladin with a cry, "I saw a fine looking man in black walking

the street,
He grounded the animal with a stick, killed him with a single throw";
On hearing this, Aladin said to Baig, "Who is he that can kill with stick?"
"I can tell only after I've seen him with my own eyes," was Baig's reply.

*

When no opportunity to see the king came forth,
Soomro consulted his lodger innkeeper, who told
Her son Mohammed to take his savior to the place,
Where King Aladin's bell was, there Mohammad told Chanesar,
"This bell rings only when its rope is pulled by one hundred petitioners,
Only then does the king call them in";
So the Soomro, straining his whole body, pulled the rope
So hard that the bell fell on the ground,
As sound of its heavy fall echoed through the trees,
King Aladin trembled with fear and said to Nazar Baig,
"What's it, how many petitioners have gathered
To bring the bell crashing down?"
Baig went outside where Mohammed, nudged by Chanesar,
Narrated how his companion had saved his life by killing the demon,
Thereupon the minister embraced Chanesar, n' telling him to wait,
He returned n' said to his king, "Real killer of the demon is
Chanesar Soomro from Sindh, he is waiting outside,
He's a running quarrel with the king of Gujarat,
It was God, Who guided him here to seek your help";
At the king's bidding, the brave Sindhi was escorted in;
Aladin greeted him warmly, then taking his hand in his own,
Sat him by his own side n' asked what had brought him to Delhi;
Chanesar told, "When Bhoongar Rai breathed his last,
None but I had the right to his turban,
Dodo Soomro has taken it away from me by force,
Also, I've a sister, whose guardian I am,
Her face is illumination of our mansion,
I have betrothed her to you as no one is your equal,
She too has been detained by Dodo Rai."

*

The king was pleased, so he bestowed a gold bed upon him ,
Chanesar retorted that such beds were used by his servants n' slaves,
King then ordered that Chanesar be given lakh n' quarter strong cavalry,
For marching on Dodo Rai and capturing him;
Chanesar got annoyed n' said, "What, such a small force to capture Dodo!
Let your lakhplus come, I'll personally terminate them";
Aladin asked, "What's this Dodo that you're intimidating us with?"
Chanesar replied, "He's as high as a post, head as large as a churn,
Arms like oars, chest as wide as a cot,
Goat can't bear a blow of my brother Dodo".

The king then ordered that provide him house, which was done. Thus three years went by.]

*

[Back to Dost Ali's version of the Tale]

Dodo writes to Chanesar

Wayfarers, as a rule, are carriers and conveyors of news. That's how Dodo came to know of Aladin's refusal to invade Sindh at Chanesar's request. So he wrote to his brother: 'Chanesar, you complained but he didn't attack. Here is a mule -load of treasure, give it to Aladin and bring him here and let us have it out on the battlefield like men.' Letter was delivered to Chanesar. He read it and felt deeply ashamed of himself.

When Nazar Baig saw him so depressed, he asked, "You're missing your family, aren't you?"

"No, friend, no, I'm not missing anyone. It's this letter. Either I've to kill myself or fight it out alone".

"No, friend, it isn't going to be like that. He needs a

stronger persuasion to change his mind and go for invasion. Don't worry, I'll find a way".

Chanesar's fight with a lion in Lakhhi garden

Chanesar inquired, "Are there any lions here?"

He was told, "Yes, sir, there're some at a spring close to a pond here".

Chanesar went to that spring, found a pair there, a lion and a lioness, made them compliant by fisting both their heads into insensibility, stringed them, and led them to Lakhhi, where he turned them loose in Aladin's garden. When the watchman came in the morning, he saw the lions. They had damaged the garden also. Watchman went straight to Nazar Baig, told him about the lions, and asked him to have them turmed out. Baig told him to see Chanesar about it, who was indoors there.

Watchman approached Chanesar, "There are lions in the king's garden. They've ruined it by trampling. How can they be turned out?"

Chanesar said, "Quite simple. Pour wine in the garden pond. They'll drink it when thirsty, become intoxicated, and go away by themselves."

Wine was brought by stealth, and poured into the pond. The lions, already in stupor, became more so after drinking wined water, and in that condition devastated the whole garden. Meanwhile, Nazar Baig had asked all the commanders, "Do not agree to fight the lions, and say that when we joined here, our stipulation was to fight humans and not ferocious animals". So when Aladin ordered them to expel or kill the lions in his garden, none complied. Everyone said, "Have your records checked. We agreed to fight humans only." So the king asked his own son to evict the animals. The prince rode to the garden entrance, where his horse stalled and wouldn't budge,

which left him no choice but to return.

The king talks with his son in anger. Faqeer recounts in verse.

You aren't my son but of some rustic,
You wish to rule but can't
Until you bear wounds like a brave.

The king sent for Nazar Baig, and asked him, "Have Chanesar evict the lions from the garden".

"Chanesar has gone away, sire".

"Find him, bring him back".

"I'll, but give your word in writing that you'll attack Dodo".

Giving his word, Aladin wrote, "God willing, I'll launch the invasion as and when Chanesar asked".

When Chanesar came, he invited the king and his nobles to come and watch his fight with the lions. So they went and stood outside the garden to see te spectacle with their own eyes.

Mighty Chanesar fights the lions without any arms. Faqeer tells of it in verse.

As the king n' his courtiers watch,
Mighty calls out to the lion,
"Rise, you son of cat, shake off sleep",
The male rose roaring as thunderstorm n' charged,
Remembering Maula, the giant launched his fisticuffs,*
N' crushed lion's cranium, spilling his brain,
As her mate crashed on the ground, lioness came in a dash,
"Hit her with a fist also, the king suggested,
"No, brother, no. Females are not hit with fists", said Chanesar, n'
Grasping the lioness by her jaws, he tore out her tonsils.

[*Hazrat Ali^{AS}, last of the first four caliphs of Islam]

Khilji forces for invasion of Sindh

[As per other versions of the Tale + Dost Ali's]

When Chanesar had done his bidding, the king, in keeping with his word, took up putting together of the invasion force. In reply to his query about the strength of that force, Chanesar told him, "It is useless to count troops for fighting Dodo. However, have a seven-arm tall post installed at the city gate. Then have your horses come out of that gate. Dung of the passing horses would fall around that post. When it disappears in the dung, you can have the gate closed because by then enough heads would have come out".

The reply implied: A very huge army. So the king's call for troops went out to all his *soobas* (governors/chieftains), feudatories, and friendly powers in and outside India. Aladin spent all of twelve months to collect so huge an army that the number of its horses was large enough for a seven- arm tall post to disappear in their dung, the whole sky to darken in the swirling dust raised by their hooves, and the flying birds, blinded by the dust, to come spinning down like autumn leaves for the soldiers to catch, slaughter and bag.

Head-wise, the force was of the measure of "nine or ten baskets" or "thirteen large hollow gourds", which meant, hang a large basket or a hollow gourd as the force goes by, remove when it is filled with the dust raised by its passage, go on hanging and removing likewise till whole force has passed, and so calculated, Aladin's force was large enough to fill nine/ ten baskets or thirteen hollow gourds with dust. According to one version of the Tale, one basket (or army) comprised one million heads: *'Ten baskets with the Sultan, each basket numbered ten lakh.'*

The route, along which Aladin's force marched,

Wet wood burned,
Sixty feet deep wells dried up,
Front drank, rear licked its lips,

Darling river denuded of quays,
Numerous caged crows n' pigeons lamented aloud,
Birds cursed King Aladin!

Force on the march was truly huge for it comprised

Six baskets of Iraqi horses, eighteen lakh camels,
Fifteen lakh with the king himself, their plumes high,
Thirty thousand leisurely moving elephants ,
Nine baskets each of ten lakh foot soldiers,
Nine hundred kettle drums n' eight hundred war drums on beat,
Thirteen hundred pot-tinners to whiten bright,
Fourteen hundred cobblers to stitch and mend rends,
Fifteen hundred masseurs for goodly massage,
Sixteen hundred soldiers to attend during rest,
Seventeen hundred sardars[1] to mount watches ,
Eighteen hundred Balkhi camels to carry loads,
Nineteen hundred mud-workers to dig wells.
Twenty hundred banias[2] to open shops on way,
Everyone had this refrain on his tongue, "Dodo, Dodo".

[1 Chiefs or heads. 2 Hindu retailers.—Tr.]

Chanesar writes to Dodo

Chanesar writes to Dodo. Faqeer says it in verse.

Aladin is coming to invade Sindh
With nine armies, each of ten lakhs,
Many are from east n' west,
Also from Iran, Turan n' Turkistan, their swords glinting,
And no end of brown n' black chieftains,
They'll ask for the hand of Baaghi,
If you gave her away as they want,
You'll live and reign in peace,
Else they'll shoot arrows singing through the fort.

Who had written this letter? Chanesar. To whom? To Dodo.

Carrier delivered the letter to Dodo.

Dodo has seen written words of his brother after fourteen years. As he is too overwhelmed to read it, it is read out

for him. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Ominous letter has arrived in Wigah,
Chanesar wrote n' Dodo became emotional,
He touched the letter with his wet eyes,
(Paper got drenched with his tears),
He said, "My big brother's letter has come,"
Being too excited, he couldn't read the letter himself,
So he sent for the scribe of Wigahkot.

Scribe read out the letter to him. Becoming aware of its contents, he convened a meeting of the community elders and chiefs.

Nangar to defend Sindh

Chanesar's son Nangar is now a sturdy youth of fourteen years. All community elders and chiefs are of the opinion that Nangar should lead the defence force.

Nangar has tied the traditional marital band around his wrist and is a bridegroom-in-waiting.

When displeased Chanesar had been leaving, Dodo had said to him, "Brother, don't go, I've promised my daughter's hand in marriage to your son as penalty for your right to the turban." Chanesar hadn't returned. But Dodo, as a man of his word, was keeping his promise.

Now Nangar's bride-to-be was in wanwaah with the marital band around her wrist. Ceremonies were on. Community was saying:"Nangar the about-to-be-married bridegroom should march out or conciliate his father back".

Dodo sends Faqeer for Nangar. This Faqeer is none other than the one who has been reciting verses all along and would continue to do so unto the end. His name is Bhaago and caste Bhaan. It is he who has composed this Tale. He tells of his mission in verse.

Bhaago Bhaan walked out to Nangar's residency,
A lock of his hair dangling n' playing his customary instrument,
As the sound of music is heard inside,
Maai Lakhhmaan is sent out to know*
Why n' wherefore of the minstrel's coming.

[*Literally 'woman', here 'maid'.—Tr.]

The maid came out running and asked, "Welcome, Faqeer. Say what have you come for?"

"I'm not telling you, maai. It's for Nangar himself or his mom."

Nangar has gone with his pals for a swim in Veerawaah [ie., canal named Veera].

Nangar's mom comes out, greets Faqeer and talks with him. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Greetings, minstrel, you're welcome, Bhaago Bhaan,
Say, was Dodo alright and his court?
But I hear, King Aladin has reached Sakaar,
So, my husband has ignited the fire after all.

"I've heard King Aladin has come. Chanesar has brought him. Is that so, Faqeer?"Faqeer has come charged with this very matter. So he gets down to it.

Dodo has sent me to you, Princess Maryam,
Asking for your son to go n' conciliate his dad,
Whole clan wants Nangar to launch the defence,
So that Soomris may have no trouble,
N' the threat facing the homeland is removed.

Nangar's mother answers Faqeer, who recounts in verse.

My Nangar is quite young n' still milk-face,
Unripe for a beard, he is very fond of his hair,
He'll fight Aladin but for family's honour.

"How can Nangar, an about-to-be-married bride-groom, go out to fight when there're so many commanders and troops."

Faqeer went back with this answer.

Nangar had taken some of his older friends to Veer-awaah. The younger ones had stayed back. They were running back and forth, informing of all that was transpiring. Faqeer tells in verse.

Bugle had stopped blowing, drum no longer beat,
Younger pals of Nanger were playing Surando,
They came running and told Nangar the news:
"Minstrel came to your residency,
Your mom made a short shrift of him,
Minstrel was improperly treated by Princess Maryam."

Youthful Nanger quits swimming and sends for Faqeer, who renders in verse.

Prince stopped swimming, came out remembering Hazrat Shah,
Eroding like water of an overflowing river,
leaping like a lion or a prancing deer,
Approached the minstrel in humility, saying:
"Come up, minstrel dear, you're welcome,
Was Dodo Soomro fine and his court too?
You're concerned with us, talk to us,
Bhaago, women have had clans go astray,
N' those gone astray never regain right".

"Faqeer, don't walk away."

Taking Faqeer's hand in his own, mighty Nangar takes him to the residency. There Faqeer salutes the prince and recites a verse.

These gardened mansions are superb constructions,
Pillars n' beams of sandalwood, walls musk coated,
Dodoian rugs all inlaid with jewels,

Cots of ivory and of shisham too with fine beds,
Nine matted stables of variously hued horses and mares,
Dun, black, red n' gold, all having harnesses of fineries,
Draught animals too are there with grass growers n' reapers,
Fine camel breeds like Mahri n' Dhaati amble on ground,
May the brave heroes of Sindh ever be in your company,
Nangar Khan, I've brought you news of chieftains.

After he had heard it all, Nangar asked, "Thanks be to God, but what is the news that you've brought?"

The minstrel had with him the letter written by Chanesar to Dodo. He produced it for the young man to read,who reads, and Faqeer recites a verse.

Aladin has come, so God willed,
On the morn will be known manly n' unmanly,
I too may pitch spears of war, thrash braves,
Set all rams to fight, pluck Mughals to shreds,
Turn rivers into indigo, cause streams of blood to flow in Wigah,
Even if he grants a realm, I'll not give away even a maid of Wigahkot.

"Let him come. Manly may also become known. He is asking for the hand of Baaghi. Even if he asks for the hand of a Wigahkot servant's child and grants a realm too, I'll not give away".

Faqeer wanted to leave but Nangar asked him to stay.

Nangar endows a garment upon him. Faqeer intones a verse.

He called his syce, whom he instructed
To fetch him his golden-red horse,
Its reins should be red, nothing should be amiss,
Saddle flowery with shimmering tassels,
Minstrel was donned a golden dress of honour.

Nangar gave the minstrel his mount, donned him a golden dress of honour, and told him, "Faqeer, you may leave,

I'll come tomorrow to meet Uncle Dodo."

Faqeer left. Nangar had his pals called. Pals were also of different kinds. Some are deeply devoted, some seemingly so. After having food and drinks, they asked for news. Nangar rose, drew a line with his sword, placed his sword on it, and said: "This here is a sword of family's honour. Moustache'll be immersed in milk here today and dyed in blood tomorrow in the battlefield. There's no compulsion. Whoever comes, comes with free will."

Then those who were deeply devoted jumped in.

Mighty Nangar happily goes to meet his uncle next day, taking his devoted pals along. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Bugles blowing vigorously,
Beat of tablas dancing,
Naad n' nafilis* playing,*
Murli emitting exuberant notes,*
Drums convulsing in laughs,
With such pomp n' show,
He came and sat on a rug.

[**All are Sindhi musical instruments, the first is made of hollowed reed, the second of an animal horn, and the third is a simple flute made of wood. —Tr.*]

Nangar, accompanied by his pals, came, saluted his uncle and lowered himself on a rug.

Uncle asked him, "Nangar, come, sit here."

He said, "Thanks, uncle, I'm comfortable here."

Uncle urged again, "Nangar, come, sit here."

"No, uncle, I'm fine here."

When he was asked for the third time, Nangar said, "Uncle, even daddy did not sit on that throne, how can I!"

"So you're unhappy for your father."

"Yes, uncle, I'm unhappy for dad. Here is how I feel."

Youthful Nangar bares his heart. Faqeer tells in verse.

Uncle, I think of dad every moment,
Peoples' reproaches make me emotional,
Heart breaks into two halves, lungs flutter,
I can create disorder in Wigahkot, all can watch my spectacle,
I can dislodge n' devastate the throne before the eyes of nobility,
*But by giving away *Soni's hand, you've mollified me,*
Now it's for you to toss Prince Nangar in a ravine or not.

*[*Name of Dodo's daughter. —Tr.]*

"Uncle, today dad's memory is so keen that I can remove your head as a potter removes a pot from his wheel. But no, you've mixed the blood, thrown me in a ravine. Nangar'll not answer back."

"Nangar, you might change your mind after meeting your father?"

Nangar replied, "Not at all":

One who retracts is robbed,
Nangar'll die on destination,
Give up on Nangar,
He will be borne back shrouded.

"I've given my word, shall abide by it."

Having said it, he got ready to leave.

"Stay a while, son," said the uncle.

Nangar did not stay. Before leaving, he commended for his mother's care.

He makes his commendation. Faqeer recites a verse. This verse is about human endeavour.

God causes rainfall, river inundates,
Forests drown in flood, streams begin to flow,
Remembering Hazrat Shah, peasants prepare
To raise water by undershot wheel,
Trusting in God, they scatter seed in their fields,

As young plants sprout, scarecrow-lofts are manned,
Florescence of crop turned into ears of corn,
Threshing led to separation of grain from grain,
This valiant youth will be slain before Aladin,
His mother will become an ascetic ,
For she has no other child nor he a brother,
She is commended to your care, Soomro,
Otherwise she'll be a wretch going about in Wigahkot.

This is how he commended his mother to his uncle.

Dodo replies. Faqeer tells in verse.

I consider you my son, Maryam my mother,
My daughter Soni will be at her service, Saaraan too,*
My principal queen will wave Maryam to n' fro in swing.

*[*Second daughter of Dodo.—Tr.]*

"All four of us, Nangar, will be slaves to your mother."

This done, Nangar took his leave.

The floor of the king's court in Wigahkot was of copper. As Nangar rode across, the trotting of his horse reverberated through the mansion.

As she hears the sound of the hooves, princess sends her maid to find out what and who it is. Faqeer intones a verse.

Pillars and beams shake, floors resound,
Sides of cots shiver, cradles swing,
Aladin may have come, Lakhhmaan, go find out.

Maid finds Nangar leaving. She returns to tell the princess. Faqeer tells in verse.

Gold bangle around each wrist, large rings in ears,
Son of Chanesar Rai, nephew of Dodo Rai,
Mistress, it is he who you're engaged to.

"It's your fiancé Nangar. If you wish to speak with him, do so now. There may not be another chance."

"Meeting the Kaapri again is up to fate."*

*[*An ascetic. —Tr]*

Princess comes out, salutes her would-be-husband. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Beautiful belle rose with grace n' poise,
Her charm strikes like lightning,
For she is daughter of Dodo.

Princess came, wrapping her hands in a silk kerchief, saluted Nangar, and said, "There're so many chieftains and troops, they're not going out to fight, but, instead, you, about-to-be-married bridegroom, are riding out to combat!"

Nangar answers her. Faqeer tells in verse'

Horse runs with a rider, falcon flies off a clenched hand,
We sons of soil repay readily what we take from Sindh,
Let my head, my breath be forfeit to your fortress.

"Since falcon would not fly without a clenched hand and horse would not run without a rider, troops will not fight without a commander."

Finding him determined, Princess resorts to a ploy. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Nangar, you're wearing marital armband,
Your bride-to-be is confined in wanwaah,
'Handmill and Handful of Grain' has begun,*
Marriage is to be solemnized on fourteenth,
Cooking of foods is on, so is playing of music,
Garlanded marital turban for your head is waiting,
Aunt has had ornaments designed and forged,
Mummy has had my trousseau stitched and dyed,
How can all this be allowed to go in vain,
God forbid that I wear black.

[*A pre-wedding ceremony in which married women, whose husbands are alive, put, one by one, a handful of grain into a hand-mill and grind it.—Tr.]

"If you went to war and got killed, Nangar, all my hopes and expectations will be dashed."

"No, no, it won't be like that", said Nangar.

Failing to dissuade him, princess reconciles herself to his resolve. Faqeer tells in verse.

Breathe so before Aladin that it soars to skies,
May you face Egyptian swords in front N' grass in the rear,
Don't let the Sultan light a full fire,
Go undo their tents, affright Delhi,
Then, my love, God'll bring you back from abroad,
You may then marry your fiancée and mount bridal bed,
Else I may die in Wigahkot, n' have touching of heads in grave,*
Then Holy Prophet will wed us on Doomsday.

[*Reference to a marriage custom, in which the newly weds are made to touch each other's foreheads by their close relaives.—Tr.]

As Nangar took leave of her, his aunt Baaghi accosted him, wanting to dissuade him from going to war. Faqeer renders in verse.

Nephew, Baaghi's hair-locks aren't worth much,
Marry me to whoever you find intractable,
If by giving me away land is saved, don't get men killed.

"Nangar, you're an about-to-be-married bridegroom, don't sacrifice your life. Let me sacrifice mine for you."

Hearing this youthful Nangar answers Baaghi. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Being a Soomro, I'll marry you to an equal only,
Else I'll kiss your head n' die in Wigahkot,
We Maarus are to wed a grave in a cemetery.*

[*Specifically, cattlemen of Tharparkar; generally, Sindhi speaking people. —Tr]

Nangar took leave of his aunt, returned to his residency, where he bid farewell to his mother. After putting together a nine lakh strong force, he wrote a missive to his father: "Dad, I'm coming to meet you." Messenger delivered

the letter to Chanesar.

Aladin's forces on Sindh border

It is dusk time. King Aladin came out of his tent for a look around. There wasn't a soul in sight. He sent for Chanesar to ask about it. Faqeer intones a verse.

Aladin greets, "Come on, Chanesar,
This isn't the season of rains,
Nor is the wind of rainy season,
Sun disappears as soon as it appears,
Today black clouds are amassed northward.

"Chanesar, tell me, has there been such an overcast before in this country or is this the only time?"

What Chanesar tells the king, Faqeer renders in verse:

Chanesar stepped up to Aladin,
"The Soomros you heard of
Can now be seen with eyes,
This tumultuous rumble comes from
Dodoians, the masters of Wigahkot,
Aladin, my fatherland is ablaze as lightning.

"Soomros are coming."

"Well, if Soomros are coming, what about this noise and tumult?"

"What you take for noise n' tumult is voice of soldiers speaking to each other."

"What about the lightning?"

"It isn't lightning. Arms are plated with gold or silver. As camels, horses, elephants and mules move, dangling arms glint in sunlight. That glint looks like lightning."

"You must be aware. Which chieftain is coming?"

"No sign that it's Dodo. I can't say who it is."

"No sign that it's Dodo, what then are his signs?

Chanesar describes signs of his brother. Faqeer recounts in verse.

When my brother would march from Wigahkot,
Earth will shake, trees will release wind,
Aladin, your soldiers will be too terrified to breathe,
Your sitting rich food eaters will not fight,
The sleeping will not rise out of dread,
These are the signs of Dodo Rai, you'll see them yourself."

"What about his physique, his looks?"

Chanesar enlightens the king on Dodo's physique and looks. Faqeer tells in verse.

He's as tall as a post with head the size of a big earthen pitcher,
Arms like oars of boat, waist like four-legged cot,
No one can bear blow of Dodoian Dodo save a lion.

Chanesar left after this talk.

Sindh force camps at Veerawaah

Youthful Nangar led his army to Veerawaah, where it made camp.

After camping, he sent Faqeer to have his father meet him for talks and reconciliation, if agreeable. Aladin too has come with a nine-lakh strong army. Faqeer found Chanesar sitting outside a tent, deep in conversation. When Chanesar saw Faqeer, he thought, 'In fourteen years no one, not even a watchman's child came to see me. Now that I have come with an army, Dodo is affrighted, and has sent this minstrel perhaps on a patch-up mission. But he is a mere minstrel. Some chief should have come." He directed his servants to hit the faqeer thirteen times with his own surando, and went inside his tent.

As Faqeer comes close, they get ready to fight. Faqeer intones a verse.

They surrounded Bhaan with menacing miens,
He offered them money right away,
Which they accepted n' stepped away,
Mouth said 'sit not', hand said 'there.'

Bhaago was minstrel of Soomros kings. He took out forty coins from his pocket for them and said, "Brothers, here take these coins, my weapons and horse too. Don't beat me. I've come to say a few words to your master."

"No entry, his orders."

There lay dung of Chanesar's horse. Pointing to it, they told him "Go sit there and say your few words."

Faqeer thought: In Wigahkot Soomro seat me on a cot or a chair, show me respect. Here Chanesar is seating me on dung today. How sad! Faqeer, don't mince words, truth is what he should be told. So Faqeer talks with him.

Even if you offered rug for me to sit on,
I'll consider it dirt, Chanesar Rai,
No Soomro has ever gone astray before
As you've, Chanesar Rai,
Whole world knows you've
In your genes a streak of ironsmiths.
By going to ask your mother,
You forfeited your right to rule,
I raised you rustics to royalty,
You're not fit to know us Bhaans."

Chanesar saw that if he didn't meet the minstrel, there will be more of the same kind from him. This apprehension compelled him to call him inside and have a talk with him. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Greetings to you, our minstrel,
You are welcome, Bhaago,
Was Dodo well, his reign and people?
Nangar was very young when I'd left,
He must be a youth now?

Faqeer saw that what he had come to see him about has been broached. So he holds forth.

Even as Nangar wore marital armband,
His bride-to-be was confined in wanwaah,
Ceremony of 'Hand-mill and Handful of Grain' was on,
Solemnization of wedding was fixed for fourteenth,
Kitchens were abuzz with cooking marriage feasts,
Air was filled with music, song and dance,
Head that was to wear garlanded turban,
Has come n' camped at Veerawah with nine-lakh strong army.

"It's you, Chanesar, who has brought about all this. About-to-be-married bridegroom is coming to salute his father."

Chanesar asked, "Who's the girl, from which family? Toors, Gujjars, Sammos, or other Soomros?"

Faqeer said: "No, brother, no.
He's made Nangar his son-in-law,
Soni is your daughter-in-law."

"You had left in a huff. But he kept his word like an honourable man."

On hearing this, Chanesar responds. Faqeer tells in verse.

If I had had any inkling of Soni's betrothal to my son,*
I wouldn't have brought this invasion force from Delhi,
Now the king would not return without Baaghi's hand.

[*Chanesar did have the inkling for Dodo himself had informed him of the betrothal when he had undertaken the conciliatory mission after the killing of Haalaani brothers.—Tr.]

"Now he would return only when we give away Baaghi's hand in marriage to him."

Faqeer realized that situation hadn't improved.

"Okay, you may go, Faqeer. I'll meet Nangar myself."

Faqeer went his way.

Chanesar goes to a corner of the tent and prays to God:

God, make the day longer, don't set the sun yet,
My insides are burning, breath is afire,
Let me see my darling Nangar, then I may breathe my last.

For fourteen long years Chanesar had remained clad in black out of grief and remorse.

Today he took off his black wear and put on a dress on his body, socks on his feet and plume in his turban, each worth one and quarter lakh. With that get-up he went to see whom? Naamdaar Nazar Baig.

"Nazar Baig, let us go now and meet my son Nangar, aged fourteen years, and Mangar son of Dodo aged twelve years. If they are killed in the battle tomorrow, the regret of not seeing them will remain with me unto death."

Baig replied, "Pal, eyes hanker for their sight, lips long for kissing them, your children are my children because you have called me a friend; but, my friend, would it be wise to visit the enemy at his camp?"

"No, my friend, no," Chanesar told him. "A great warrior like Chanesar is with you. Don't be apprehensive."

Both went together to meet youthful Nangar.

Nangar was stretched out in his tent sleeping soundly. He was oblivious of his coming to Veerawaah for war or having to fight the enemy. He was so unafraid that one might think he was sleeping in his palace or was out hunting.

Sawai Samejo, Jaarejo and Mangar son of Dodo were playing game of dice.

Chanesar meets Nangar

Presently Mangar caught sight of his uncle, whom he mistook for his father because the two brothers, Dodo and Chanesar, were much alike in appearance. He said to himself, 'Perhaps daddy has come to see how we are doing'. He talks with his friends. Faqeer tells in verse.

"My daddy, protector of the destitute n' helpless, has come",
"No, he's in his stronghold, this here is Chanesar Rai",
"Wake up, sleeper, your father has come";
Sleeper rose from his sleep, remembering Hazrat Shah,
Father n' son clasped each other and wept for a long time,
"Nangar, moment of war is come, brother hasn't come,
Maryam's reproaches were like lances in my heart,
Then she told me, 'I'm your sister, you're my brother',
These fourteen years in Delhi have been most depressing ,
King isn't going back without Baaghi".

The moment his father mentioned Baaghi, Nangar wrenched himself free from his clasp, and, remembering Maula, hit his father with his palm, who reeled and fell on the ground. Youthful Nangar answers his father. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Yogurt suits in a churn, butter milk suits in a milk pail,
He who shuns ancestral way is but a thorn.

Youthful Nanger then stared at Nazar Baig, who, sensing the youth's annoyance, talks with Chanesar. Faqeer intones a verse.

Chanesar Soomro, idiot, what have you done!
Sight of your son n' nephew has saddened me so,
Make up among yourselves, return to Wigahkot,
God willing, I'll peruade the king to go back.

Looking at Nangar, Chanesar said, "I'm ready to make up right now, but the king would say I was unfaithful, not faithful. Come to the king's tent tomorrow with one sword and fifty young men. We'll have a patch-up between ourselves, and also

have the king return."

Four watches of night passed. Sun rose. Nangar proceeded to King's tent with fifty young men. Encountering a grandee on the way, he inquired, "Who is he?" and was told, "He's Tamar Baig, a minister of Aladin, going on a hunt". He said to himself, 'I should talk with him, he may help and war may be averted.' So he saluted the minister, who did not respond. He was with hundred horsemen as against Nangar's fifty. Nangar calls out to him. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Days of your hauteur n' arrogance are over, Tamar,
Pride has spoiled you, I'll take the wind out of your airs,
But I am going as emissary, Dad may reconcile,
In case he doesn't make up n' battle is set up,
I'll plant spears of war, thrash warriors,
Field all Soomro rams, have streams of blood flowing in Wigah,
Then I'll fall upon you, Tamar, with fire-spitting force,
Cut off your head and raise it on spear.

A fierce look from Nangar made Tamar mount his horse and gallop away with all his hundred guards, saying, "Though posing as his son-in-law Nangar, it is Dodo himself in disguise."

Nangar and Mangar call on Aladin for peace

Nangar and Mangar arrived at the spacious four colour tent of King Aladin. Nangar asked the guard to inform his master that Soomros had come for a talk. Chanesar had come there ealier and gone inside.

Aladin asked, "Who are these Sammo or Soomro chiefs, who've come for a talk?"

Chanesar told him, "Neither a Sammo nor a Soomro chief."

"Then who they are?"

"Two boy servants."

Dodo had sent Aladin a message that his servants would be enough to deal with him. Aladin recalled this. He thought, 'He says they are boy servants, they say they are Soomros. He may reconcile with his own people and harm me!'

Aladin is in perplexity, so he tells Chanesar,
"You say they're boy servants,
They say they're Soomros,
Why not enlighten me with their antecedents?"

Chanesar promptly responds. Faqeer recounts in verse.

They're indeed boy servants n' work for us,
Seeing so immense an army, they're affrighted,
Hence are hiding under the umbrella of Soomro Dynasty,
Let them come inside the tent,
Here they'll hand me the turban and you the marital bond.

Aladin orders a five hundered strong contingent against fifty of the so called servants. Faqeer describes in verse.

The five hundred troops called to duty were all Pathans,
Who untied and mounted their thoroughbred Arabs;
To thrash the so called servants,
So that Dodo may foment their wounds.

Chanesar asked, "How many are servants, and how many your soldiers?"

"Fifty so called servants and five hundred our soldiers."

"Neither one nor two, ten times more in one go, why?"

"They're servants of Soomro, could be good at fighting."

"If you asked me, I'll tell you; all five hundred may be lost."

"Then, advise me what to do."

Chanesar advised him.

We call servants those who drink milk with us,
Five hundred Pathans called by you are doomed,
Soomro servants will destroy Delhi and all its defenders.

Aladin was confused. "How can mere servants destroy Delhi and its defenders?"

Chanesar told him: "They're Soomro servants, won't deal with your minister or grandee. Invite them in and ask for and get your betrothed."

[Note: The versions of the Tale, on which this edited translation is based, do not say why Chanesar concealed his blood relationship with the two youths and persisted in lying about it. —Tr.]

So Aladin instructed his chief guard to let two of them in and others may wait outside.

Prince Nangar and Prince Mangar stepped up to enter. Both princes sat down on the rug, cross-legged, with Nangar gripping the handle of his sheathed sword.

Maandhan Rai, a commander of Aladin, without waiting for negotiated settlement, asked for the hand of Baaghi. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Maadhan interposed with the remark,
"I'll come one day soon as groom's mate of Aladin,
Camp my forces around Wigahkot,
Pick out Soomri from amongst one lakh n' quarter.

It was an affront which no Soomro worth his salt could stand, least of all hot-blooded youth like Nangar. So he gives a fitting reply to Maandhan Rai. Faqeer tells in verse.

You haven't much sense, so speak not,
No big talk in the presence of Aladin,
Don't think Soomris helpless,
Rulers of Wigahkot are their protectors,
If Dodo Rai comes to know of what you said,
He'll have your skin stuffed with hay.

Aladin asks for Baaghi's hand

King Aladin looked at Chanesar.

Chanesar said, "You yourself ask for her hand in marriage. Your ministers can't get it for you."

King Aladin so asks Prince Nangar, who answers. Faqeer tells in verse.

Right in the meeting youthful Nangar spoke:

"Marry one of your nieces to our Mangar,
Your darling daughter in Delhi,
Have me as her husband,
Let Dodo marry your sister,
You two thus become each other's brothers-in-law,
Don't feel wretched when we carry off your mother,
Each of my fifty companions here can have
One of your bangle- wearers for wife".

Nangar's little speech offends Aladin, who yells in anger at his men. Faqeer tells in verse.

Looking around his four colour tent,
King shouted: 'Grab this young boy Nangar,
Bisect him forthwith n' dispatch to Wigah.'

On hearing this, the soldiers inside the tent rushed out and called other royal soldiers to come and fight the Soomros. Young Mangar lifted wall of the tent and looked out. He saw troops pouring like heavy rain. Faqeer describes in verse.

Pathans came in a massive downpour,
Howling n' screaming like east wind,
Bouncing like lions, prancing like deer,
Surrounded the royal tent on all four sides.

Seeing the immense force, Mangar said to Nangar, "We are heavily outnumbered. Let's return to our camp." Faqeer recounts in verse.

Mangar said to Nangar, "Brother, come closer,
Treacherous is having us killed by tricking us to come here,
Fifty of ours are no match for ten times more of the king,
Let us scram now, we may not get another chance."

Nangar responds to Mangar's suggestion. Faqeer describes in verse.

Don't be dispirited, Mangar, Hazrat Shah is our protector,
What you take for a great army is but wild grass to me,
We have brave heads on our shoulders,
Mother did not ever sing us a lullaby of running away,
I'll demolish the four-colour, destroy dangerous beasts,
I'll fight and chastise the plumed army,
Even so, my dad, protector of the helpless, is present here,
Our quarrels may be years old, he'll not abandon us, though.

Mangar's response was: "Bravo, swing your sword and kill the king. It will make his troops take to their heels like scared rabbits."

Nangar unsheathed his sword and lunged. Chanesar stepped up against his chest, stopping the blow. He lunged again. But Chanesar again stepped up against his chest.

Mangar called out, "Nangar, enemy is being saved. He too is enemy. Now your sword blade may go though your dad, the king and the throne into the floor."

"No, brother, a father killed by his son's hand! No salvation on the Day of Reckoning."

This brings tears to Mangar's eyes. He reproaches his uncle. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Mangar shed tears, which Chanesar Rai saw:
"Perfect one calls his own young to be slain";
As love for his own resurged in his heart,
Giant of Wigahkot, wearing ankle length gold garment,
Raised head in plumed helmet, swelled his armoured breast,
N' touched daggers n' scimitars on his body,

His stockinged feet scraping the rugs loudly,
In a mad rush he kicked the throne, toppling the king,
Scores came, saw and bolted in terror of Chanesar Rai,
Holding Mangar under one arm and Nangar under another,
Brought his own to their camp at Veerawaah,
"Boys, yonder are your tents, this is the battlefield".

Chanesar was in a towering rage. He escorted his son, his nephew and their fifty companions and left them in their camp at Veerawaah, unharmed.

Meanwhile, back at the Khilji camp, they brushed up the king and seated him on the throne. Chanesar returned there, and saluted Aladin. King did not acknowledge the salute.

"You took the boys to their camp. They are closer to your heart, aren't they"?

"Know ye, king. The one who unsheathed his sword is my son Nangar. The one who spoke to me is Mangar son of Dodo. The elder is fourteen and the younger twelve." Touching the king's arm, he continued, "If I had let them, they would have removed your head as a potter removes a finished dish from his turning wheel. Your cavalry would have fought as if mounted on haltered horses. I saved your life as favour. I've left them out in the field, have them killed by whoso you like."

'Horses and riders ploughed up dust in battlefield'

The huge invasion force of King Aladin also contained a nine-lakh strong army of hunters. First battle was assigned to it. It prepares for battle, obtains war material. Faqeer describes in verse.

It took the hunters' army full day to equip for war,
With twelve hundred fully loaded wagons,
It marched, crunching, on Roopaah.

Nine lakh hunters descend on the battlefield to the beat of war drums. Faqeer recounts in verse.

As night passes, day breaks, morning star rises,
Slogans of Ghaus Bahawal Haq are raised,
Hunters beat war drums of Delhi,
Drum beat is a challenge:
'Come on out, Nangar,'
Remembering Hazrat Shah,
Nangar charged with his army,
Green, yellow and mink mini flags aflutter,
Mace-wielders and flame-throwers went into action,
Scintillating swords swished,
Arrows flew in and out like locust swarms,
Horses and riders ploughd up dust in battlefield.

Battle is getting more and more fierce by the hour. Fighters are dying in droves. Faqeer describes in verse.

They fought with daggers and scimitars,
Struck with spears and javelins,
Swords of steel fell on men,
Blessed be mothers of those,
Who came charging in,
Bodies of these braves lay in dust,
Limbs of chiefs floated in blood,
Swords of Khafifs struck with swish,
Soomros mowed their foes like wild grass,
They'd just one cry on their lips: 'Hit, Fight,'
Nangar smashed howdahs n' helmets of elephants,
Broke fright of the timid,
Felled browns, who screamed piteously,
Heads of hunters rolled on salty ground,
They forswore to fight with Nangar again,
Below was Nangar's menace,
From above came rain in torrents,
Storks and cranes flew away their separate ways,
Battle ended on the ninth day
As there was no hunter left to fight with,
*Most lay dead, remnants had escaped to Naaro**

[*A tract in Tharpakar, Sindh.—Tr.] .

Having rested for eight days after trouncing the nine lakh strong army of hunters, youthful Nangar wrote to King

Aladin: 'Come fight in the field yourself; spare the poor, don't send them to their deaths.' He had to write because no one was left to go back and tell what had happened.

"Who would go fight now?"

"Ten lakh are there, sire, as nine lakh could not win."

"How many would win?"

"Two against one."

"The Negro army is eighteen lakh strong. Negro himself is a mighty fighter."

"This army is twice the number of the hunters.' Field it, it'll certainly win."

Kings summons Negro. Faqeer tells in verse.

At Sultan'sbidding, a hermit, a noble, n' a masseur,
Untied their horses n' rode up,
Inquired of the doorman,
'Where is Baanko Barkhurdaar?'
'He has just had his victuals, Negro is asleep now,
He'll present himself before the king on the morn.'

They went back and told the king, "Negro is resting, will come tomorrow."

"No, bring him now."

They did.

"We can't rest, can't eat, and you are wallowing in slumbers. Go attack Nangar," Aladin ordered Negro.

Negro answers back with hauteur. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Nangar is just a child, still a breast feeder,
His face is yet hairless, fondles his locks,
I'd like to attack Wigahkot,
Where Dodo has his forces.

"Allow me to go and kill Dodo, thus free the land from this menace."

"Killing Nangar is as good as killing ten Dodos."

Chanesar was also sitting there. He spoke to Negro:

Negro son of Nemur, no loose talk,
Don't make tall claims before Aladin.

Negro responds:

Fatty, don't throw your weight about,
Go join Nangar n' see me folding up Veerawaah tomorrow.

"You too go join your son. Battlefield will determine tomorrow who's who."

Negro prepares for war. Then goes and launches his onslaught. Faqeer describes in verse.

Men fought with swords for thirteen days,
Forces were still locked in combat on fourteenth day,
On fifteenth day men saw radiance of the sun,
Negro was left with six n' Nangar with nine.

Only six remained of the eighteen lakh troops of Negro, and nine of nine lakh troops of Nangar.

Nangar wrote for fresh troops. Until they arrived he took rest. He again wrote to King Aladin not to have poor killed. King read the missive.

War between Hambas Khan and Nangar

Whom was the king fielding this time?

A Pathan named Hambas, who also commanded a nine -lakh strong army. During the lull in fighting, the reinforcements sought by Nangar had also arrived.

Both sides had equal number of troops.

Mighty Hambas was pitted against youthful Nangar. It was a contest between two braves. Faqeer describes in verse.

They fought with daggers and scimitars,
Hurled spears and javelins,
Steel swords slashed men,
Horses trained by them ran up to hit n' trample,
Piercing with spears, they hid under horses,
"Hit, Fight" was their lone cry,
Nangar's pals came up, shedding tears of blood,
"This Pathan is a master of acrobatics,
We stand no chance against this brave,
He'll kill all Soomros, all would be beheaded".

Whenever Soomros got a chance to lunge, the Pathans took cover under horses' bellies, leapt over shoulders, squatted under shields, and thus escaped blows. But whenever Hambas got a chance, he removed Soomro heads as a clay potter removes a utensil from his wheel.

Here there were bravos for Nangar, there for Hambas.

Nangar wanted Hambas located. His pal, Sawai Samejo, undertook the task. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Remembering Hazrat Shah, Sawai Samejo rode out,
He found Hambas aboard an elephant,
Pathan told the driver not to have the elephant kneel,
"That stalwart is headed for us, let him come abreast",
Sparrow is fighting hawk, trusting Hazrat Shah,
Sawai received eleven blows of sword,
He retreated toward his blue horse,
Hambas told his horsemen to rein in,
Chasing a runaway was never a part of mom's lullaby.

Sawai Samejo has sustained eleven sword wounds. He has retreated. Hambas is unharmed.

"Fall back, Nangar. Stop fighting, Nangar. We'll fight with bow and arrows. They don't let us land a sword blow. So swordsmanship is ineffective against them."

"You want to fall back like a coward, thus demean my clan. I'm giving you a manly advice. Do it."

Nangar advises his pals. Faqeer tells in verse.

Nangar gives his pals a sensible advice,
"With full force hit and smash the horses' saddles, killing their riders".

"When sword is struck at the riders, they hide under their horses. Hold your sword in both your hands, plunge so hard that it cuts through the saddle, the rider, and bites the earth."

The advice was taken.

People asked Mangar, "Pathan is evading your blows. Should we send Nangar?"

"Not yet, brothers," Mangar replied. "Let me try my luck first".

So, Mangar confronts Hambas. Faqeer describes in verse.

Remembering Hazrat Shah, Mangar rode in,
He found Hambas aboard an elephant,
Pathan told the driver "Make the animal kneel,
This is Mangar Soomro, prince valiant of Wigahkot,
Let men fight in the field, exhibit their prowess";
Mangar tried his best to hit, but Pathan just slipped away,
Mangar received eighteen slashes of sword,
He stood his ground, unmoved and unfeeling, like a rock.

Presently Nangar missed Mangar, began to search for him.

He keeps fighting as he searches for his cousin. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Having fought southward, he turned eastward,
Having fought eastward, he turned northward,

Having fought northward, he turned westward,
Mighty dispensed death in all four directions,
Coast resounded with clash of arms, waves trembled.

Mangar and Hambas were fighting, when Nangar appeared. Chanesar also happened to be there. When he saw his son, he called out:

Hambas is still alive!
Kill this man here in the field,
*He said he would fold up Veerawaah.**
[*It wasn't Hambas but Negro who had said so.—Tr.]

When Pathan heard this, he bragged. Faqeer describes in verse.

None but an equal in age n' stature may kill me,
I'll kill these Soomros n' stack up their corpses,
I'll march on Wigahkot, where Dodo n' his forces are.

"I've already killed one, am about to kill another. When I kill Dodo after killing Nangar, then you'll realize who is who, Chanesar."

"Disarm," Chanesar called, "throw down your sword, Nangar. Win kudos by killing unarmed."

Nangar let his sword fall on the ground, challenged Hambas. Both got locked in combat. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Trusting Hazrat Shah, sparrow fought hawk,
This tried his best, that managed to evade,
At last gripping the other's loin,
He beat him against the ground again and again,
Like washer-man washing clothes,
He was summoned to God as his time was up,
"Here, take your braggart, who was to fold up Veerawaah,
Brother, carry the Khan on a cot to Aladin".

Hambas had his sword with him. Nangar was unarmed. Pathan made a lunge, his sword poised to strike. Prince joined

his feet and leapt three to four steps high. As he came down, he managed to clasp the other's wrist of the sword-holding hand and flung him on the ground like washer-man's washing. Then he tossed him into the howdah.

Some were killed, some ran away.

Nazar Baig's fight

Youthful Nangar returned to tent. Hambas Pathan was Nazar Baig's nephew, his sister's son. It was to avenge his nephew's death that he led the next battle against the Soomros. He entered the field. Faqeer recounts in verse.

Martymdom of Nangar

Grandsons of Bhoongar play the game of war,
Vintners brought out bottles of red wine,
Young friends of Nangar went on drinking,
'Hit, Fight' is the refrain on their lips,
Idlers of Delhi city would not win,
Mouthing 'Aili, Aili', they attack like locust swarms,
Swords n' cutlasses, bows n' arrows,
Spears and javelins, daggers n' axes,
All, at feverish pace, slash, pierce n' cut,
Wound, maim or kil high n' low alike.

Nangar mused: 'Mangar is dead. My army is annihilated. If I went back, I wouldn't have the heart to raise my head before uncle. I failed him, my family, my clan, my country men. No, I can't go back. I've sustained twenty and ten wounds. I can't survive in any case. Why not die here in the battlefield, where I fought for the honour of my motherland.

So thinking, he lay down in a corner of the battlefield a little away from other dead and wounded but close to his cousin Mangar, and bled to death in the glow of the setting sun.

Chanesar had the dead bodies of his son and nephew sent in a coffin to Wigahkot, religiously bathed and shrouded.

Aladin's war with Dodo extends to Wigahkot

Thinking that killing of the two valiant princes must have dented the Soomro resolve to defend their realm, Aladin decided to extend the war to Wigahkot, his adversaries' stronghold. So the Khilji camp on the border of Sindh was dismantled, and the invasion force headed for the capital of Soomro kingdom [which, according to some traditions cited by Dr. Baloch, was Roopah and not Wigahkot – Tr].

'When Aladin's forces reached Dhatt, he sent a message to Dodo:

Dodo, my armies are now in Dhatt,
I'll capture waters of Roopah, dash Sindh.'

From Roopah, he planned to march on Wigahkot. His troops were to

'Secure Roopah, then go fight for the Fortress of Wigah.'

[What follows is largely sourced on Dr. Baloch's 'Study.' – Tr.]

Khilji forces did not have a smooth sailing. It faced resistance all along its march into Sindh from big and small communities. Whoever heard of the invasion, came out fighting to repulse or impede it and laid down his life doing so. Apart from common people, some native chiefs and nobles like Veerum Paahorio, Deo and Aasio Sodho, and Ghalo Ghaanghro led their clans to give tough time to the foreign invader.

As the news of the Khilji army's advance reached him, Dodo Rai began to mobilize his forces and resources. He also wrote to neighbouring rulers and friendly chieftains for military and material aid, which they provided promptly. One of the measures that he took before opening of hostilities (on the advice of his army chief and minister Baarun) was to send the Soomro princesses into refuge.

Not long after the encampment of the Khilji forces close to the Sindh capital, bugles blared, drums beat and

battles began.

As the sun unveiled its fiery face on the eastern horizon,
Warriors descended on the field, armed to the teeth,
Those of Delhi were commanded by General Nazar Baig,
The winner of the last battle in which Prince Nangar was killed,
Those of Sindh were commanded by General Baarun,
While his troops slashed, pierced and cut through the invaders,
He and his twelve select comrades uttered a horrible cry n'
Fell upon as many enemy chiefs, swords slicing, spears pinning,
Killed or wounded all and scores more, spared none,
As the ball of fire travelled across the noon-bright sky,
Exhausted warriors stumbled back, panting, to their camps,
Fresh troops were sent in to continue the orgy of death,
Till one or the other side could unfurl the flag of victory.

Dodo was aid and support of all. They fought for him because they believed in him, trusted him. When no chief was left, Dodo himself went in to combat, his belt of steel around his waist and his famous seven-sword weapon, 'Trihaang' in his hand.

As Dodo joined the battle, trees released wind,
Sun was covered by dust, nothing could be seen,
Forest caught fire, animals abandoned their lairs,
Dodo's awesome bearing and fierce mien
Struck terror in the hearts of enemy,
As he began to swing his Trihaang, it seemed
Not one but seven swordsmen were on a slaying spree.

The seven-sword weapon stopped its murderous swings only when not a single enemy soldier remained alive in the field. Having cleared the ground in the very fist battle like a river in spate that washes away both its banks, he returned to Wigahkot. Afterwards, in order to consolidate his position, he made his camp close to that of Aladin, wherefrom he fought several battles in a twelve coss* or kos* field.

[*Indo-Pak sub-continental measure averaging 1.75 miles.—Tr.]

It was a twelve-kos ground, where
Blood-thirsty armies assaulted each other.

Thus Dodo waged war for fourteen days, in which a large chunk of Aladin's force was destroyed, but much of it still remained. He fought his last battle, wearing a shroud; and launched his attacks with such ferociousness that they said to Chanesar, 'Today mare of Dodo is swimming in a river of blood.' This battle lasted for seven days. Seeing his courageous assaults, everyone thought he was invincible. Then at Chanesar's suggestion, they resorted to a clever ploy, in which Dodo and his mare were struck with long and stout spears while leaping.

As Dodo hung high, face down, upon sharp spear points, Chanesar looked up and asked him, "Now what, Dodo?"

Dodo answered, "Brother, you're still standing lower than me."

Aladin ordered, "Cut off his head."

O seven-weapon Soomro, none is nobler than you,
May your mother rejoice among Sammo n' Sodho ladies,
Beard yours is dyed red (in blood) like pomegranate flower.

[According to another version of the Tale, Dodo was mortally wounded. Chanesar approached him and said, crying:

I never imagined that lord Dodo will die like this,
He was protector of the weak, compassionate n' just.

Dodo was thirsty. Chanesar brought water for him to slake his thirst. But Dodo told him, "How can I drink your water, when all my own have departed hungry and thirsty. You may prostrate me, though." So Chanesar gently and tenderly sat him on his folded legs and placed his forehead, face downward, on the ground. In this Islamic posture of prostration before the Almighty he breathed his last.

Yet another version has it, while assaulting Aladin in his howdah, Dodo was caught in a cutting contraption, which

severed his head. His head was raised aloft on a spear. While it was still there, his headless body on the ground rose to its feet:

> *Headless body shook itself to rise, chaste like its head,*
> *Struck Aladin's army some swift blows.*

It killed ten courtiers, who were standing there, and then put the sword through its own self. It was eighteenth of the dark half of the Hindu month of Chet (March-April) and Sunday, when Dodo embraced martyrdom.]

[Translations from Dr. Baloch's 'Study' and Dost Ali's version]

Dodo had sent away the Soomro ladies into refuge before he joined the battle.

With whom the refuge was taken? With Abro Sammo.

Abro Sammo and Dodo were friends. One day they were playing chess. In the course of play a chessman of Abro became vulnerable. As Dodo moved, rather hurriedly, to take it, the chessman slipped off the chessboard into Abro's lap. Dodo demanded its return so that he may take it. But Abro refused, saying, "It has sought refuge in my lap. I'll protect it even at the cost of my life."Dodo leapt to his feet. So did Abro. Dodo unsheathed his sword. So did Abro. They were about to cross swords, when Bhaago Bhaan came between them and said, "Lord Dodo, Chief Abro is a friend, and a guest here."

When the question of finding refuge for the Soomro ladies arose, the incident of the chessman came to Dodo's mind: 'Abro'll prefer to die than surrender a refuge seeker."

So, Dodo dispatched Princess Baaghi and about sixty other ladies of the Soomro households for refuge with Abro Sammo.

Dr, Baloch cites some oral traditions in his 'Study' to the effect that there was mass exodus from Wagahkot at the

time of the ladies' departure and that the number of was much higher.

> *'Noble ladies of Wigahkot are gone, so are two n' half lakh other people.'*

> *'Baaghi and nine other royal ladies went with nine hundred female attendants.'*

Abro Sammo and others battle Aladin

After Dodo was killed, Aladin entered Wigahkot (or Roopah) and found the town empty. He was also informed that Soomro ladies were gone to take refuge with Abro Sammo. He sent a message to Abro demanding return of the Soomro princesses, which was refused. So he headed for Kutch to attack Abro. On way there a number of chieftains and stalwarts valiantly assaulted his troops, killed many of them, and died fighting valiantly. They were:

- Jaam Muhar Notiaar, he killed fifteen thousand khilji troops.
- Aari brother of Jaam Muhar Notiaar
- Thebo, who stood like a pillar on behalf of Abros
- Parhiyaar
- Abro Junajaani of Kakraalo
- Jagsean Weghwaar
- Mungarbhiyaani
- Morio Sammo, who fought for nine nights and ten days
- Barrun, who hesitated in the beginning, but later fought and died
- Odhar Udhejo, who fought for ten days and was killed on eleventh day. It was after his death that Aladin was able to advance.

In order to face Aladin, Abro Sammo called warriors of his community and Jarejos of Kutch, and awakened them to the looming danger. In response to his call, his brothers, nephews and other close relatives, friends and comrades as well as

Jarejos joined the cause. He was the leader of all who fought to protect the refuge seekers and defend the town .Better known among these warriors for their bravery and courage were his brother Bhalo Jaam, his Nephew Sabarr, Jakhhrio Jaarejaani (or Hothiani), and his own son Mumut of Mohmat.

The first battle against the invaders was led by Bhalo Jaam and his comrade Azeem.

Tightening the strap around his horse, brave Bhalo rode out,
Manly Azeem too mounted his horse to do battle,
Twisted and turned like a black serpent.

*

Bravo to Bhalo Jaam and also to Azeem,
The stalwarts didn't evade fighting Aladin,
No blame lies to them for falling on eleventh day.

Both fought incessantly for ten days and laid down their lives on eleventh day. Then Abro sent Sabarr, his nephew and son of Bhalo Jaam, to do battle. Sabarr fought bravely, and toward the end crossed swords with Saalaar or Sayyad Ghaazi Saalaar, son of Aladin and commander of his army. Both died fighting.

They turned on each other at first twilight,
Sabarr and Saalaar fought each other to death.

Among others who distinguished themselves by their fighting spirit and prowess one was Ranmal Jarejo, a close friend of Abro Sammo, and the other was Mamat, son of Abro.

Jarejo entered the field with his warrior clansmen. He told Abro, who was already in the field, "Rest assured, I'll not let them take the refuge seekers even when I'm slain. I've a great number of fighting men. You should, therefore, go rest for a while." Then he placed his trust in God, took out his sword and charged the enemy.

"I'll not let them take the Hameerian progeny even if I'm dead,

I've warriors aplenty, go cool off your overworked limbs",
Tells Jarejo to his friend Sammo, says Inayat,
His trust in God, Ranmal swishes his sword.

Mamat, on his part, so pressured the Khilji troops that they ran to the king and said:

Forsooth, you're a great swordsman, over there's mighty Mamat,
As wheat is thrashed to separate grain from husk,
Likewise his blood-thirsty dagger thrusts through n' through.

Sometimes father and son, Abro and Mamat, went in to fight together:

Abro astride blue mare, Mamat on a red,
No one matches their bearing.

In one battle both rode in together, and attacked roaring like lions. But it was fate that Mamat was killed, and Baaghi wailed:

Mamat, my young brother, I never imagined,
You too would go away as did Dodo.

Abro is killed and refuge seekers disappear

In the final battle, Abro entered the field with his 'Trihaang' weapon, and

Fought as fiercely as swift flowing water sweeps away,
Sun does not emit light, there's loud thudding.

Abro confronted nine score and ten lakh troops of Aladin. He was mortally injured in this battle.

Abro sustained score and ten wounds,
Mighty turned his head, still breathing.

Then he went to the refuge seekers and, before breathing his last, asked them, "If you seat me over there, cleaned and freshened, with a naked sword in my hand, no

one will dare to come inside." Ladies did as asked.

After the death of Abro Sammo, King Aladin thought that no one was now left to confront him. But when Jakhro Jaarrejaani, who was now responsible for protecting the refuge seekers, sounded the war drum, the king became worried because he was short of groceries. He offered temporary halt in fighting so that he could arrange adequate food supplies. Jakhro did not agree. Instead, he opened not only his granaries but also his wine cellars for them. Thus, he let the nights pass in eating and drinking, and days in fighting until he had had most of Aladin's remaining warriors slain, and himself too.

There are different accounts of what happened to the Soomro ladies after the deaths of their protectors, Abro and Jakhro.

One is that Aladin, dispirited by enormous losses, declared Baaghi as his sister and returned to his realm, leaving the refuge seekers unharmed, unmolested.

Second is that Baaghi went back to Wigahkot with all other royal ladies and attendants.

Third is that, finding themselves without protector and hence vulnerable, the women left the Abro fortress in Raipur town of Abrasio and headed northward. After crossing Raipur river, they turned westward. On hearing of it, a contingent of Aladin's army went in pursuit. When they saw that their capture was imminent, the ladies prayed to God for preservation of their honour and chastity. The prayer was granted. The earth opened up to swallow them. The place, where they disappeared, is two miles east of Werrsar and two miles north-west of Raipur. Nearby is 'Sand-dune of Abro', the burial place of Abro Sammo. These remains as well as the town of Raipur are said to be still there. Every year in the month Badi a fair is held in the memory of Chief Abro and the Soomro ladies.

Chanesar's end and Aladin's return

The company that had gone in pursuit of the Soomris returned empty handed to inform the king of their miraculous disappearance. The knowledge of not gaining what he had come for coupled with the monumental loss of men, material and, above all, face made Aladin very despondent. Taking stock of the situation, he decided to terminate forthwith his wasteful expedition. Since Chanesar had been the cause of it all, he was not to be turbaned and sat on the throne of Sindh. 'But I must do something about that throne before going back to my capital'.

Compared to Chanesar, who was self seeker and treacherous, Jaam Abro was a man of honour, who had given away head but kept his word by not surrendering the refuge seekers. Let us have a look at that honourable head. It was severed and brought, aloft on a spear, which was planted on ground for the king to look it over. Aladin rose to his feet and saluted it, saying, "Praise be to you for giving your life for protecting the honour of someone else' ladies; even in death you are not bowing yourself."

Sky is higher than all, no one is higher than sky,
Abro, even after death you hold your head high,
Bravo to you for not surrendering any refuge seeker.

On learning that his dead father's head had been severed from its body, Bhoongar Rai, seven to eight year old son of Jaam Abro, thinking the act as sacrilege, came out of the palace with a naked sword in his hand to take on the Khilji troops. They took away his sword and patted his back for his fearlessness. The king called him and sat him by his own side, and in a gesture of appreciation for his brave and honourable father, he devolved the responsibility of ruling Sindh on his young shoulders. Chanesar thought: 'I'm being bypassed for a boy who has no right nor claim, even when it is our family that has been destroyed. It was I, who has wrought this havoc on my family and people, I must pay for my dishonourable act.' As

he mused, a kind of frenzy began to take hold of him. All of a sudden his self control snapped, and he fell upon the Khiljis in a fit of madness.

Ground resounded with a howl, Chanesar is on war path,
Mighty has attacked the plumed troops in sheer frenzy.

In the ensuing battle Chanesar died, but after killing all but eight of Aladin's warriors.

Broken in spirit, Aladin picked his way back to Delhi, accompanied by his eight warriors. When the group reached Mirpur Maathelo, it stopped at a well to slake its thirst and water the horses.

While they were resting some women came there to fill their pitchers. They recognized Aladin as the king who had come with a huge army.

One of them remarked, "This is King Aladin with just eight warriors,"

Another asked, "whatever happened to his hordes?"

"Dodo has made short work of them," pat came the reply.

The taunts were most humiliating. Feeling ashamed, Aladin thought, 'Even these rustic women have not spared me. What they'll do to me in Delhi is unimaginable. I'll be reproached and taunted and laughed at. My name will be dragged through mire. It is better to die than face such ignominy."

He then took nine pills out of his pocket. Having placed one pill on his own palm and the rest on the palms of his each companion, he pronounced 'Hoo'. All swallowed, and died there and then. They were buried there in a tomb now known as '*Nanv-a Gori Pir*' (Nine Pill Saint).

***

DEATH OF DODO SOOMRO

AN OPERA BY

SHAIKH AYAZ

(02.03.1923-28.12.1997)

[Translated from the original in Sindhi by SNh)

ACT ONE

[*A candelabrum is burning in the tent. Chanesar sips wine as his concubine, Chholi*[1]*, sings and whirls in a dance.*]

Chholi:

Drink to live, live to drink,
Dingle a dink, dingle a dink;
Darky night, look aquick,
Dingle a dink, dingle a dink;
Candle aflutter, final a quench,
Dingle a dink, dingle a dink;
Dingle a dink, dingle a dink.

Chanesar (*in itoxicanted chant*):

All things come n' go,
All things break their custom,
Whatever is, is this moment,
Death is inevitable, death is inevitable –
It's *Karoonjher*[2], it's *Kaachho*[3],
It's *Manchhar*[4], it's *Miani*[5],
It's bed-time of cloudy season,
It's time of *Vaisaakhhi*[6],
It's footprints thine n' mine,
It's born with thee n' me,
It's come from the unknown,
N' returns to the unknown,
Yields not to any one.
Many have come on this earth,
N' made her dance to their tune;
No one knows of them today,
Whence repose?

There isn't any resting place (for them) –
The other world is nowhere situate,
Dust has no beginning;
Whatever any one may say,
Whom doth death support?
It turns all truth into untruth –
Death sparkles like a gem,
That's set into life,
Into every one's chest –
Is there any runaway
Or anyplace on this earth,
Which is free from it?
Every man is a lyre
Attuned in death –
Every moment is a grain split upon heart;
If every one hath to die,
Not ever to return,
Then all this phenomena is in vain!
Every scowl n' arrogance is in vain!
Every ego is false,
Every one's measure is a yard or two;
A tribute given or taken, so what!
A loss suffered or inflicted, so what!
All man's glory is dust,
His dignity is dust;
Guilty and guiltless
Have the same terminus;
For all have to die
N' fill earth's belly.

[*He holds a lock of Chholi's hair in one hand, and with the other fills his cup from the flagon.*]

Even if it be lame,
A living dog is better than a dead saint!
O my girl, how do I know
If the sun rises after my death!

The present, the full-moon-lit night,
Is every thing;
Thy sprig-like body
Is jasmine-fragrant
N' honey-sweet —
Nightlong cooing of a cuckoo
In a dark wood is better,
N' that fair dame is better,
Who offers her ripe body
N' provides a few juicy moments.
In the rainy season a nightlong swing
Turns the jarful of date-tree juice
Into richly fermented drink
That sets every nerve on fire.
"There's no greater glory than living,"
Is what the sages say.
Death is total darkness,
Fistful of bones knocked out by a single blow.

Chholi:

Sire, I'm just a potteress,
Not very wise or sensible,
Even as I hold life dear,
I've observed how
Earthen urns are baked in a kiln
N' painted with many a pattern!
Some turn out to be so half-baked
That a small blow or jolt breaks them;
Yea, but no body is sure,
Which one is full-baked;
I have seen even such pitchers
Breaking into pieces on a fall from the stand –
Yea, even so *'Gharoli'* sung to their beat
In our tender n' gentle speech,
How sweet, how lovely it sounds!
N' what is an earthen cup!
But when it's filled with wine, cooled nightlong,

Whoever has sipped it, all smiling,
In the wane of night,
His life is worth it;
Otherwise dust is all worthless,
Wine is the great substance, Sire,
Otherwise dust is nothing, Sire.

[*Chanesar goes into a reverie, and then raising his head stares at Chholi for some moments and tells her to sing some other song. Chholi sings a Vaaee*[8].]

Chholi:

Though flowers wilt every day,
Fragrance doth stay;
For once the air smelt sweet
As all guiles of fear lay in defeat,
Though flowers wilt every day.
If you took my hint,
You'll leave your scent
Permeating all over —
Fragrance doth stay,
Though flowers .....

[*The song is stopped midway as Saalaar Khan, Commander of Aladin's forces, enters the tent without permission and tells Chanesar that Dodo had refused to surrender. Chanesar fills a wine up and offers it to Saalaar Khan, who guzzles it down in a gulp, and then both plan a stealthy night attack on Dodo's army. Chholi hears it all, dumbfounded. Saalaar Khan, having guzzled several cupfuls of wine in the meanwhile, pulls Chholi to himself, intoxicated. She frees herself and clings to Chanesar.*]

Chanesar [*laughing lewdly*]:

Hoho hoho, haha haha,
Oho oho, aaha aaha,
"Though flowers wilt every day,"
Even then every one likes them —

Female is a charm,
Moonlight is fragrant,
Any beefly, drawn by scent
Would go to suck the nectar;
Female is a casket of musk,
Whoever takes off its lid
N' spreads its perfume,
Warms every ones heart.

[*Looking towards Saalaar Khan, he continues*:]

She is my deed,
My crown, my throne,
My hand, my weapon,
And a blow to the foe,
I'm no fool to hide her from you.

[*To Chholi* :]

Fear not sword n' sheath,
Shed thy shyness, go,
To him thou go.

[*Chanesar pushes her towards Saalaar Khan, who pulls her so eagerly that her bodice is torn at shoulder. Curtain.*]

ACT TWO

SCENE I

[*It is midnight. Dodo is sitting outside the tent looking at the sky. His sister, Baaghi, is by his side.*]

Dodo:

Thick clouds have laid a siege
With dense darkness, shutting out
The moonshine, that was there a short while ago;
Gusts of rugged wind resound through the night,
Little wonder if force of the wind
Blows away canvas-walls of the tent
N' the tent itself, whole of it,
Comes crashing to the ground!
Every thing appears to be unsteady
Except man's spirit;
Stronger than every rock though he be,
At times softer than cotton he becomes
As if he were a water-bug;
But when he takes it upon himself,
Sky and earth shake,
Stars bow to him,
Mountains pay him obeisance.

[*Looking at Baaghi, addresses her:*]

Khilji has asked for thy hand in marriage,
N' wants the throne for Chanesar.

Baaghi:

What of crown, what of throne,
What of gold-cast fortune,

Man's cupidity is in vain;
Man comes naked, returns naked,
But you do grant
That your throne is a trust,
All treasure is a trust.
Though there be kings aplenty,
People are happy with you –
Every abode has a green tree,
All around there are festivities at dusk;
The *Laarries*[9], having tilled their fields,
Bedeck themselves with flower-patterned *Ajraks* at sundown,
N' gather at bathing places along canal-bank,
Singing the sweet melody of *Raano*[10],
For their woes n' worries are no more
N' their slumbers are sound and happy.
If you surrender your crown,
You'll cause distress to every one;
Those alien invaders, wherever they set foot,
Let loose a reign of terror n' plunder –
When a serpent crawls out of her hole,
Nothing escapes her darting tongue,
The monster gobbles up raw
The little ones of the dove in bushes;
If you've seen a serpent,
You must have seen,
So long as her tracks remain intact,
Every being trembles in terror.

[*Placing her hand on Dodo's chest, she continues*:]

In every man breathes his father
N' all his paternal, maternal forefathers,
One or the other confronts him every day,
As none of them ever remains unconcerned;
Any coward among them assaults him masked every time,
Stifles the truth in him,
His grit n' courage all lost.

This creature of blood n' sinews
Is indeed a reflection of his ancestry.
If you go down fighting,
You'll have sacrificed yourself for this Land;
O Dodo, you'll breathe no more,
But people's faith'll live on;
Your sons, if not, then your grandsons
Would remain parallel with you,
For liberty they'll crawl
N' fight acrawling unto the last;
Leave a precedent for them,
Or leave a blank, if you so wish .....
For me, you may accept anyone,
Khilji or a dog,
It's all upto you!

Dodo:

Thee n' me are of the same blood,
Thee n' me have the same zest for life,
It was wise what thee said just now,
It's after my own heart;
Man isn't a lump of clay,
He's neither deaf nor dumb,
Man is all a mystery but a voice too;
A teal flying off water
Is like a flash of cold light;
Death is a shadow sans substance,
Yea, but something likely outlives,
That's spark of gene,
Living through eternity,
Averting obsolescence,
Imparting strength n' sap;
Baaghhi, what thou sayest is true,
That if I lay down my life today,
Sacrifice myself for this Land,
I'll breathe no more,
But people's faith'll live on.

[*Chholi comes running, and falling down on Dodo's feet cries out sobbing:*]

Chholi:

May you live long, lord Dodo,
My gracious lord Dodo,
Melody is a dream,
When I sing, this whole universe
Is wrapped up in the blue beauty of rhythm;
With me comes a respite
In the suffering of generations,
With me comes a wave of happiness,
I am tingling of ankle-bells,
When I whirl my feet on this earth,
Star-coins jingle,
Gold-coins, my barter, are nothing,
I was a fool to have traded my body,
My body, upon which
The moon bowed,
All phenomena bowed,
I am priceless.
But, oh, if some one loves me,
Brings in his folded lotus-like palm, n'
Showers pearls, enjoys me .....
No pearl is a match for dew,
A wet eye is priceless,
But, alas, I didn't
Appreciate my own worth,
Or see through Chanesar;
What spell did charm me,
What weakling did enamour me so,
As to have wasted my life!
Today my face is ash-strewn,
N' I am all nude;
I am a flower-bed of trampled-upon blooms,
Laid waste from close proximity in close intimacy,
The blame for it all is mine.

I didn't realize what I'm,
Woe betake Chanesar,
A delusion, a snake in grass,
Victory gained by chicanery ends in rout;
Whoever enters morass,
Goes down and dies .....
No one has swallowed morass;
Dodo, my liege,
They're plotting a surprise attack for tonight.

[*Dodo takes Chholi by the arm and pulls her up to her feet.]*

Dodo:

There's no better shawl than honour,
Freeing oneself from falsity,
Any time, is no cause for regret;
Truth is a washerman,
Whose steam-wash
Knocks out sins, removes filth from heart.
They're bright hearts,
Who keep away from falsehood.
They finally come up from pits,
Whose nerves are like ropes.
Every life lived without truth is tasteless.
The pain thou hast suffered would
Brighten thy songs,
Enkindle lamps inside thee.

[*Looks towards Baaghi:*]

All comrades of a coward are liars,
When want stretches its hand to beg,
Its bowl is filled with falsity,
And when the beggar goes away,
Falsity laughs at him,
Tearing away the sheet that covers his face --
Whoever happens to touch it, regrets,

Whoever takes alms, becomes a leper,
Chanesar may now think whatever he likes,
No one knows him better than I:
Whose string is in alien hands,
Can't help to dance to the string-puller's tune,
Utterly helpless that he is,
A tug at the string pulls him down,
Places him on a throne, then pushes him off,
Makes and breaks him by pulling his nose-string.

Baaghi:

Every thought of a coward is false,
His gain, his toil is all false,
His way is false,
His love is false,
As if he mistook a fragile bangle,
For a handcuff of others!
N' perhaps he thinks –
There's no reaction to an action;
Every thing is here and now,
Man is no more than a corpus
That breathes,
Death dwells in his guts
Like a tick on a dog's ear.

Dodo:

Death is everyone's foe,
Though a hunter lies in ambush,
The birds, hundreds of them,
Fly from their nests down to water holes,
Flap their wings,
Hold sun to their bosoms,
Not worrying when and who of them
Would be pierced with an arrow!
Why man is afraid,
Death being a catcher's catch!
Why is this fear in man?

No one can say after his death:
"Alas, I am dead, a pass-away with time."
Death is a fear in futility.
But time is inexorable.
There's is no sunset over void,
Darkness is not infinite,
Stars twinkle within it,
Cascading in lights,
Life is the glow of generations,
Luster of bright gazebos,
From which look out every day,
Wise men, lighting their lamps;
Spark of life shall ever remain aglow,
It's come down aglow to me,
N' shall remain aglow after me,
From one generation to another.
What I've to do this day,
I shall do, that is,
Light up my own lamp.

[Curtain]

SCENE II

[*Dodo orders the war drums to be beaten and the warriors to be armed. Sky is no longer cloudy, and the camp is visible in the moonlight.*]

Dodo:

The braves, armed to teeth, are marching out
In orderly formations,
And my heart beats in jubilant dance.
O Soomris, get ready
To leave and seek this very night
Protection of Abros,
Whose equal in valour
Is nowhere to be found
All across this Land.

At the moment the river is dry,
Some of you may ride
Eight-year old camels
N' some thirteen year olds,
And some may walk a brisk step!
Protection by Abros
Is like the shade of dense trees;
These princes fight
With their shields unshielding,
And kill even while they die;
Honour is steeped in their every nerve,
They value it more than their lives;
Sipping the cup of self-sacrifice,
They confront n' resist, strike n' deflect.
Until they fall at the feet of Motherland Sindh.

[*To Baaghi:*]

Who knows who will be slain,
Those cowards coming in swarms
To attack thy brother,
And may be Sindh will be lost.
I'll strike n' behead the enemy until I die;
As long as this head is on my shoulders,
They sha'n't occupy this Land,
Who is our Mother.
Else this life is of no use;
Would that it be of use to the Mother,
Would that it bears no blame,
Would that no harm comes to thee,
Would that thy day is not spoiled;
O my own sister, I wish thee
To be always happy n' contented.

[*Baaghi and other Soomro ladies depart riding camels. Curtain.*]

ACT THREE

SCENE I

[*As Dodo exhorts his army, Chholi watches from inside the tent.*]

Chholi [*to herself*]:

Dodo was a spell of a charmer for thee, or,
The Moon;
Thou had wondered,
'I am a chholi,
'How can I rise to reach him?
'Moon casts shadows from afar,
'What multiforms he displays from afar!
'Yea but he is so distant
"That to be near him is not possible."
How did thee go ashore,
What is in the shallows, o Chholi?
Dirty n' defiled as thou art now,
What do thou hope to gain by coming back?
Moon is gone, gone too far,
Last hour is come!

Dodo [*to his army*]:

Why art people affrighted by death,
When they die every day?
Some die of this,
Some die of that,
Some die this way,
Some die that way,
Those, who pass their time
With braves, with swords, with arrows,
N' have their limbs chopped in battlefield,

Those valiant ones, they die for some cause;
Some drink physician-prescribed toxin,
Live and die as lames, maims,
Or waste away, groaning n' grumbling.
Every day thousands of men,
As if in queues n' files,
March into dark tortuous death-grounds.
This crumbling soil,
Who knows whose it is!
O ye sons of those bygone brave-hearts,
Those high-head mighties,
For whom retreat was a shame,
They wouldn't step into homes
So long as alien steps trod this soil!
Those resolute intrepid men
Were never cowed by adverse wind,
Nor were those courageous steel-limbed ones
Ever shaken off their feet by a dust-storm;
Those valiant ones shine in thee, exultant and proud.
O ye true sons of Sindh, Self-Sacrificers,
Go n' vie with the enemy today,
Each one of you should so train his bow
As to be right on target,
Shooting arrows in a swishing shower,
Like a heavy hail-storm,
Not even a reed is to survive!
Let thy thorough-breds run in a gallop,
Raising dust-storms all around,
Their neighing striking such terror into enemy
That he loses his spirit instantly.
Today ere we return,
We'll cut down n' kill,
Or go down fighting!

Chholi [*aside*]:

This crimson-headed liberty,
It's deep-sown in man,

It appraises self-reliants,
Gives heart to weaklings!
Bestows free will on fate,
N' fate on free will;
How it heightens suffering!
Roars like a lion
N' stretches roped paws,
How it resonates in roaring!
O Dodo, may my life be forfeit for you,
May it be so
That I too defeat the guiles of fear!

[*Chholi comes out of the tent carrying a bow and a quiver full of arrows. As she hangs the quiver on her shoulder, there appears in the distance a whirl of dust and dirt, and sounds of horses' hooves are heard. Curtain.*]

SCENE II

[*It is twilight time. Most of Dodo's army has been extirpated, and the rest has dispersed. The battlefield is littered with slain and mortally wounded warriors in their thousands. Among them lies Dodo on the ground, looking at Chholi with sad eyes. Chholi holds a firebrand in one hand and in the other a water bag from which she pours water into Dodo's mouth, sobbing bitterly.*]

Dodo:

The last hour is come,
Death is a final gasp,
As one unties the rope from the shore,
N' the boat rushes off in a flash,
Unaware of the mystery of the Deep,
Neither of this shore nor of that shore.

[*Chanesar comes looking over dead bodies, and seeing Dodo, stands over him.*]

Chanesar [*to Dodo*]:

The swell of a water-bubble is in vain,
Why did you choose death, Dodo?
Every man's renown is dust,
His sway on this earth too is dust;
Had you agreed to submit,
You would've lived in luxury
N' not died in prime like this!

Dodo:

Say what thou may,
I wont die,
I'll come back in changed guises;
Though thou may wish otherwise,
Thou too, Chanesar,'ll come back before me,
Under a new name,
In a new guise,
Thou n' I are locked in mortal combat,
Since eternity,
N' shall remain so locked
Till eternity .....

[*Dodo passes away. Chholi wipes her eyes and sings.*]

Chholi:

Every day moths burn themselves up,
Behold, flame of the lamp burns as ever.
One light goes out, another is lit,
Gazebos are ashimmer at all times,
Behold, flame of the lamp burns as ever.
In every darkness, in every maze,
Some men smile and swagger.
Behold, flame of the lamp burns as ever,
Behold, flame of the lamp burns as ever.

[*Curtain falls.*]

Notes:

1. Chholi is equivalent of wave in Sindhi.

2. Kaaroojher is a hill in Thar region of Sindh.

3. Kaachho. Valley in the hilly region (Dadu district) of Sindh.

4. Manchhar. A lake in Dadu district of Sindh.

5. Vaisaakhhi. A Hindu festival held in the 7th month of the Vikarami era usually on the banks of a river.

6. Miani. Literally a fishery. Historically, the site of the first of the two descive battles fought between the hastically collected/regrouped and ill equipped forces of the native Talpur rulers of Sindh, and the highly disciplined and heavily equipped forces of the British – the first took place on 17th February 1843 at *'Miani'* about 13 kilometers north of the Hyderabad Sindh fort on the banks of the Phuleli canal; while the second was fought 5 weeks later on 24th March near *Dabbo*, a village 13 kms. east of the Hyderabad city. As a result, Sindh became part of the Raj.

7. Gharoli. Literally, a small baked-earth pitcher. Here a kind of Sindhi song sung to the accompaniment of music produced by rhythmically striking a *gharoli* with palm and fingures.

8. Vaaee. A kind of Sindhi Verse.

9. Laarries. The people of Laarr, the southern region of Sindh.

10. Raano. Hero of the folk-tale of love, ***Moomal-Raano***; here the typical tune in which Shah Lateef's verses on the folktale are sung.

***

DODO-CHANESAR

A PLAY BY
AGHA SALEEM
(b. 07.04.1935)

(Translated from the original in Sindhi by SNh)

Scene One

[*Royal palace of Dodo. The two windows in the facing wall look out on the dark sky outside. Koel is sitting on the four poster bed near a window, stringing a flower garland. A maid is fanning her with a peacock-feather fan. Some other maids are also seen moving about, which shows that the whole palace is awake. Baaghi Bai walks in with a royal gait. Koel dismounts the bed and bowing her head speaks.*]

Koel: Madam Aunt, Koel places her hands on your feet.

Baaghi: Princess Koel may always bloom like roses.

[*Slight stillness. Baaghi steps up to a window.*]

Baaghi: Koel.

Koel: Yes, madam aunt?

Baaghi: Any news of the Turban?

Koel: None, madam aunt.

Baaghi: [*with seriousness showing her unease*] All chieftains of Sindh have gathered today to decide about the Turban of Sindh.

Koel: It's about to be decided. Turban would be bestowed upon Uncle Chanesar. When he would come wearing the Turban, I'd put this garland around his neck.

[*A vase with withered flowers is lying on the side. Baaghi goes near it and pulls out a withered flower.*]

Baaghi: Today my heart is withered like this flower. I'm anxious about the decision of Turban.

Koel: Maid.

Maid: Yes, milady?

Koel: Any news about the Turban decision?

Maid: No, milady; there's still no news.

Baaghi: [*in a worrying tone*] God knows what has been decided!

Koel: Maid, send a soldier to bring the news of the Turban decision.

Maid: As you wish, milady.

[*She leaves. Mild silence.*]

Baaghi: [*looking out of the window*] Night is so dark today. Who knows when will the night end and dawn appear?

Koel: Just one more watch, night'll end and dawn'll appear.

Baaghi: Each moment is a drag. Time has stood still to hear the decision about the future of Sindh. If the decision is against the time, then ....

[*Suddenly a voice comes ringing from outside.*]

'East is all dark,
'West is all black,
'South is all volence,
'From north comes neighing of alien horses,
'Groom'll mount a horse,
'Horses'll trample bridegroom,

'Sindh'll wed,
'Breeze is fragrant with scents of bridegrooms' blood,
'Breeze is fragrant with
'Scents of bridegrooms' blood,
'Breeze is .....'

[*Baaghi and Koel listen to the voice as if in a trance. The voice gradually passes out of hearing.*]

Baaghi: What a fearsome voice it was!

Koel: God knows whose voice it was!

Baaghi: Is Time forecasting something fateful?

Koel: Maid.

Maid: Yes, milady?

Koel: Whose voice was that?

Maid: A possessed person has arrived in Roopah, who goes about raving.

Baaghi: [*to herself*] Groom'll mount a horse... Horses'll trample on bridegroom... Sindh'll wed...

[*Presently there comes the sound of drum beats followed by a clamour of unintelligible voices. Both, Baaghi and Koel, cock their ears to hear.*]

Baaghi: Turban has been decided, but in whose favour?

Koel: In favour of Uncle Chanesar surely.

[*A maid enters.*]

Maid: Turban has been decided, milady.

Baaghi: What is it?

Maid: Turban has been awarded to Lord of the Land Dodo.

Koel: What, to daddy?

Baaghi: And Chanesar?

Maid: Chanesar didn't accept the assembly's decision and stormed out.

Baaghi: I was certain the decision would go the way it has. Chieftains of Sindh would elect Dodo and not Chanesar as sovereign of Sindh.

Koel: But, aunt, Uncle Chanesar has the right to the Turban.

Baaghi: Yes, it is Chanesar's right. But assembly doesn't favour Chanesar.

Koel: But dad has refused to accept the Turban many times.

Baaghi: Yes, Dodo did refuse the Turban many a time.Then the assembly sent it to me so that I may govern like Empresses Tara Bai and Hemoon Bai. But sisters do not wear turbans when brothers are there. So I sent the Turban to Chanesar but assembly didn't accept my decision also; ultimately Dodo had to accept the the Turban.

[*A bugle is blown.*]

Baaghi: Sovereign of Sindh is coming.

[*Both the princesses stand to respectful attention. Notes of royal music are played in the background. Dodo walks in. Baaghi steps up and bows her head before him. Dodo places his hand on her head.*]

Baaghi: Congratulation to Lord of the Land on ascending the throne of Sindh.

[*Koel steps forward and bows her head before Dodo.*]

Koel: May the head that wears this Turban always remain safe and secure.

Dodo: May God give strength to this head to bear the weight of the Turban. Even a hill was like a cotton ball to Dodo but today his head is unable to bear the weight of this Turban.

Baaghi: Dodo's head is to remain ever aloft as it's to bear the weight of the honour of Sindh.

Dodo: Baaghal Bai, we regret that we've had to wear the Turban of our brother Chanesar.

Baaghi: You haven't worn the Turban by yourself. The assembly has had you to wear it.

Dodo: We can never forget that Chanesar is our elder brother and this Turban is his.

Baaghi: This Turban is neither Chanesar's nor Dodo's, but it's of the assembly and whoso the assembly wants to wear it has the real right to it.

Dodo: But it's because of this Turban that blood has turned into enemy of blood.

Baaghi: Blood is thicker than water. Chanesar will never turn into your enemy.

[*Heavy silence settles in the room for a while.*]

Dodo: Baaghal Bai, we've decided to wed Princess Koel

to Chanesar's son Nangar. [*Hearing about her marriage, Koel covers her face with her veil and goes out of the room.*] All chieftains of Sindh will be invited to the wedding. We'll announce on the occasion appointment of Nangar, and not my son Mangar, as my heir to the throne.

[*Chanesar walks in.*]

Chanesar: No one but I can be master of this Turban.

Dodo: Brother Chanesar...

Chanesar: [*interrupting Dodo*] Do not call me your brother. You're insulting the sacred relationship of brotherhood.

Dodo: Chanesar, how can we not call you our brother? You're our flesh and blood.

Chanesar: I too considered you my flesh and blood. When you stumbled as child, I held you to my bosom. When you underwent any suffering, I felt it in my bones. But today I've realized that I can't be your brother because you're from one mother and I'm from another.

Dodo and Baaghi: Brother Chanesar!

Baaghi: Our mother is this here our homeland. Waters of the Indus are our motherly milk. All of us have been breast-fed by this earth. All of us are each other's real brothers and real sisters.

Chanesar: I too used to think that. I used to consider Dodo breast-feed sharing brother, my armour, my shield. Any blow aimed at me would be borne by Dodo on his own chest. But, on the contrary, you've landed a blow on me.

Dodo: Brother Chanesar, it isn't our fault.

Chanesar: No, it's my fault that I thought you enemy as my path-finder, and gave you space to hit me. But mind you, Dodo, I'll settle my score with you.

Baaghi: Brother Chanesar, please don't talk like that. If brother opposes brother, Sindh'll become desolate.

Chanesar: No matter if Sindh becomes desolate, I'll have the Turban though.

Baaghi: Brother, what'll you do with wearing Turban of desolate Sindh?

Chanesar: I want the Turban, I don't care if it is of desolate Sindh or consolate Sindh.

Baaghi: Homeland is mother. You care more for the Turban than mother.

Chanesar: Turban is man's honour, and I care more for my honour than anything else.

Baaghi: [*with passion*] Turban isn't yours but assembly's, and assembly has awarded it to Dodo. Now its master is Dodo.

Chanesar: I'll take the Turban off Dodo.

Baaghi: Remember, Chanesar, a sister's hands that are raised to bless her brother will redden you in blood.

Chanesar: Seeing me alone, the hands that wear bangles are threatening me today. But bear in mind that I'll revenge mself on both of you.

Baaghi: Chanesar, Chanesar ...

[*She grasps Chanesar's arm, but he frees it with a jerk and walks away in anger. Mournful music is played. Dodo moves up to support his sister. Curtain falls.*]

Scene Two

[Royal palace. *Koel is sitting on the four-poster bed. Baaghi is peeping out of the window. After a while she leaves the window, talking to herself.*]

Baaghi: *East is all dark,*
West is all black,
South is all violence,
From north comes neighing of alien horses.
Which horses are to come here neighing from north and trample our grooms?

Koel: May the grooms of Sindh ever remain safe and secure, may they never have to face adversity.

Baaghi: Breeze is fragrant with scents of grooms' blood. Koel, do you also smell scents of blood in the breeze?

Koel: I smell only scents of fresh flower-buds in the breeze.

Baaghi: May flower-buds ever bloom afresh in Sindh and may they never get scorched by hot winds.

Koel: Madam Aunt, possessed people just rave and rant. Why have you taken a possessed person's ravings to your heart?

Baaghi: I heard Time echoeing in the voice of the possessed. Hearing him I felt as if conscience of the epoch was speaking.

[*Dodo walks in.*]

Dodo: Brothers' eyes are ever eager to see their sisters smiling, but today my eyes see lines of worry on the forehead of my sister.

Koel: Dad, ever since Uncle Chanesar has departed in anger, madam aunt has not been able to sleep.

Dodo: Chanesar's anger has also deprived us of sleep.

Baaghi: I've heard that Chanesar has left Sindh for some other state?

Dodo: Yes, Chanesar, annoyed with us, has abandoned us.

Baaghi: Chanesar's departure has me worrying. I'm afraid he might bring a foreign force.

Dodo: [*laughing*] Chanesar won't ever do it.

Baaghi: It was rebellion that I smelt in his talk.

Dodo: Chanesar can rebel against us but never against his homeland.

Baaghi: I've been uneasy ever since he left. A kind of foreboding has taken hold of me that some calamity is to befall our homeland.

Dodo: To face calamities is the wont of men. We're prepared to face every adversity. Baaghal Bai, we've a happy news for you.

Baaghi: Tell me quickly, brother, for my forebodings-prone unhappy heart is anxious to hear something happy.

Dodo: [to Koel] Darling daughter, we wish to speak to your aunty alone.

Koel: [*bowing her head*] As you wish, dad. [*She exits.*]

Dodo: Baaghal Bai, we've fixed the day of marrying Koel to Nangar. It'll be held on the full moon night of the next month.

Baaghi: May all Sindh youths mount horses as bride-grooms and married girls live happily with their consorts.

Dodo: We've sent out invitations to all chieftains of Sindh. Just before *nikah* (Islamic solemnization of marriage), we shall announce Nangar as successor to our throne.

[*A maid enters*]

Maid: Ruler of the Realm, Prince Nangar is here to touch your feet.

Dodo: Ones owr are never detained out at the door. Prince Nangar may come in right away.

[*Maid exits. Prince Nangar enters after a short pause.*]

Nangar: Slave Nangar touches the feet of the Sover-eign of Sindh.

Dodo: It is painful to hear you calling yourself slave. You're our helpmate, not a slave. Nangar our son, you'll be married to Koel next month on the full moon night. All chieains of Sindh will assemble here that day. Before them all we'll ap-point you as successor to our throne. [*Short pause.*] But you appear a little worried.

Nangar: I'm ashamed to tell.

Baaghi: [*alarmed*] what's it?

Dodo: We Soomros haven't done anything so far of

which we should be ashamed.

Nangar: But, Uncle Sir, this time something has happened to make us bow our high heads.

Dodo: No power in the world can make us bow our high heads. Our heads can be cut but never bowed.

Nangar: Ruler of the Realm, dad has taken his grievance against your goodself to Delhi.

Baaghi: What, Chanesar has taken his grievance to Delhi?

Nangar: Dad'll get a force from Aladin to invade our homeland.

Dodo: It's lie. Chanesar'll never do it. He'll never have his homeland, his mother, trampled under foreign feet.

Baaghi: [*to herself*] From north comes neighing of alien horses; breeze is fragrant with scents of grooms' blood.

Nangar: It's true, Ruler of the Realm; we've received authentic intelligence that dad has gone to Delhi for armed assistance.

Baaghi: Chanesar, you've defamed your lineage by complaining to aliens.

Dodo: Soomros can never defame their lineage. The land of Sindh can never beget such a son. It's a lie, a slander against our brother. Chanesar'll never do this. If he ever does it, Aladin would never help him as we've friendly relations with him.

Baaghi: Why're you doing this, Chanesar? You'll have

foreign forces invade your homeland, your mother, deprive laps of this realm's mothers of their offsprings and brides of their bridegrooms!

Nangar: Mothers' laps are filled for the day when their offsprings would die for their homeland, brides live for the day when their bridegrooms would redden themselves in the blood they shed for the homeland.

[*Dodo lets out a cry. He steps up and grips Nangar's shoulder.*]

Dodo: Your blood is as tempestuous as Indus. No one can covet the land, whose mothers can beget sons like you. Sister Baaghal, there's nothing to fear for we haven't ever learnt to fear. Mothers have sung lullabies of death to us, and death is afraid of us. Battlefield is a bridal bed for us, which we adorn with our blood. If anyone eyes covetously our homeland, we'll swoop down eagle-like and pluck out those eyes. Prepare for war and Nangar's wedding. Our Nangar'll either wage war or wed our daughter Koel.

[*Curtain.*]

Scene Three

[*Royal court of Dodo. All chieftains of Sindh are present. Nangar and Mangar are seated on either side of the throne. Arrival of Dodo is announced.*]

Court Announcer: All present to stand up, eyes lowered, heads bowed; Stalwart of Sindh, Valiant of the Vale, Bravest of Braves, Hero of Heroes, Fearless Master of the Turban, Soomro Sovereign Dodo is coming.

[*All in the court rise to their feet. Dodo walks in and ascends the throne. All courtiers resume ther seats.*]

Dodo: Stawarts of Sindh and Peace-Loving Chiefs, this day is of great joy for us. We are adopting our nephew Nangar as our son by uniting him in holy wedlock with our daughter. Your coming here to share our joy is most gracious. We welcome you with all our heart.

We are about to take an important decision today. But before we do so, we seek your advice, for we have never decided anything without consulting you the leaders of public opinion in this realm. You are aware that the rightful heir to the Turban of Sindh was Chanesar, but you had it wound around our head. This has alienated our brother, our flesh and blood from us. Now we have decided that instead of our son Mangar our nephew Nangar would ascend the throne after us.

[*clamour of voices*]

One chieftain: Nangar would succeed to the Turban?

Second chieftain: How can Nangar be the successor?

Third chieftain: Successor to the Turban is Mangar son of Dodo.

Nangar: [*rising to his feet and bowing his head*] Lord of the Land, rightful successor to the Turban is Mangar. He is my brother, and I do not want to deprive him of his right.

Mangar: Ruler of the Realm, I accept your decision.

All chieftains: We endorse. We endorse the decision of Ruler of the Realm.

Dodo: It is as we hoped, that you would not disapprove. Now we want to consult you on another issue. We have heard that our brother Chanesar has taken his grievance against us to Delhi.

[*clamour of voices*]

One chieftain: Chanesar has taken his grievance to Delhi?

Second chieftain: No son of a Sindhi mother can take his grievance to aliens.

Dodo: We are certain it is a lie, and no Sindhi can do it. But if Chanesar has done this, then we are sure that Aladin would not help him at all as we have friendly relations with him.

A chieftain: But if Aladin comes with an invasion army, what then?

Dodo: Then we will hold peace talks with him first because our land is a land of peace, and we have never been aggressors. Our soil is embedded with sweetness of love. But if Aladin acts aggressively against us, then each person of our realm would march out to wring his neck.

A chieftain: Sindh is proud of begetting a son like Dodo.

Dodo: Let the wedding ceremony begin now.

[*Playing of shernais and drums in the background. A turban is placed before Dodo, with which he winds first turn around Nangar's head. Each of the chieftains then step up to wind a turn till the turban is fully wound. Afterwards a sword is brought and handed to a chieftain, who bows his head over it, and passes it on to a chieftain sitting next to next for doing the same till at last it reaches Dodo, who hands it over to Nangar. Now* moarr *(a kind of chaplet with several strings of threaded flowers dangling to cover face of a bridegroom down to his neck) are fetched. Dodo ties it around Nangar's head. Just then beat of war drum is heard from outside.*]

Dodo: Beat of war drum amid marital music!

Chieftains' uproar: Beat of war drum!

[*Nangar parts dangling flower strings to hear the war drum beating. A soldier enters.*]

Soldier: Ruler of the Realm, army of Aladin's commander Saalaar Khan has besieged Sindh.

Dodo: That which we feared has come to pass.

[*Chieftains jump to their feet clasping their swords.*]

One chieftain: We'll reap their heads.

Second chieftain: We'll turn our swords into pink brides in their blood.

Third chieftain: We'll redden palms of Nangar with *henna* of Saalaar Khan's blood.

Dodo: Do not unsheathe your swords lest their awe sets the earth atremble. Time to unsheathe swords has not come yet. We are peace loving. We wish to know what does Saalaar Khan want, peace or war?

[*Enter another soldier.*]

Soldier: Ruler of the Realm, emissary of Saalaar Khan has come to touch your feet.

Dodo: He be brought inside immediately. [*Enter emissary*] Greetings to the guest.

Emissary: I bring salutes from Saalaar Khan.

Dodo: We accept his salutes, and want to know whether Saalaar Khan wants peace or war.

Emissary: Peace, your majesty.

Dodo: In that case the land of Sindh is a dining sheet for him.

Emissary: Saalaar Khan has brought a message for you from your friend Emperor Aladin to the effect that Turban of the rule over Sindh may be placed on Chanesar's head.

Dodo: We value Aladin's friendship but he has no right to meddle in our domestic affairs. The issue of Sindh Turban is for the people of Sindh to settle and not for Aladin.

Emissary: Saalaar Khan has also brought a happy message for you.

Dodo: We would like to hear it.

Emissary: Your brother Chanesar has offered Aladin to turn the mutual friendship into kinship.

Dodo: Be more explicit.

Emissary: Chanesar has offered to marry his sister Baaghi to Aladin, who has accepted the offer.

Dodo: Not a word more, you insolent. [Jumps to his feet in passion] Does Aladin not know that whoever articulates the name of a daughter of Sindh, we pull out his tongue from uvula? Doesn't he know that when we calm and affectionate people become passionate, mountains break up into smithereens and pinnacles of heaven go down plummeting? Doesn't he know that we're volcanos, and when we erupt into a rain of fire and lava, all around things begin to burn? Earth quakes and quivers, cosmos shakes and trembles, sky splits in sheer terror of our passion. [*After a pause for breath, he resumes in a quieter voice*] Declaration of war be made. Today our bridegroom, Nangar, will mount the bridal bed of death and embrace the bride of martyrdom.

[*Curtain.*]

Scene Four

[*Entire palace is adorned and made up like a bride. The whole atmosphere is made sleepy by the thin smoke spiraling from burning sticks of incense in the dim light of candelabra. On the decorated four-poster bed lying between the two windows is seated Koel as a bride. In the background rise the mournful and forlorn tunes of shernais. Nangar walks in, holding the moarr in hands. Koel leaves the bridal bed in slow motion and approaches Nanger with small steps.*]

Koel: Today is our consummation night. Shernais are being played here and war drum is being beat there. Go, my consort, into the battlefield to dye yourself red in blood.

Nangar: Would that I die for the homeland, live again to die again.

[*The* moarr *in his hands falls on the floor. Koel stoops to pick up the* moarr.]

Koel: Brides pray for the long lives of their grooms. But when the honour of homeland is trampled on, brides also pray for their grooms that they may sustain flower-like wounds, that they may dye themselves red like these hennaed hands.

Nangar: Would that I wash away with my blood the stains of the homeland given to it by the hooves of alien horses.

Koel: May you sustain all wounds on your chest and none on your back. [War drum beats] Go, husband, mount your horse and enjoy the bridal bed of martyrdom slaying the enemies.

[*Nangar exits. Koel is now all alone. She has tears in her eyes and a smile on her lips. She steps out of the room*

slowly. Dodo enters and views sadly the forlorn and desolate bridal bed of Koel. Baaghi walks in. She too looks at the desolate bridal bed, and then turns to her brother, whose eyes are still on the bridal bed of his daughter. Baaghi's eyes well up with tears, which she wipes away with a corner of her poati (a thin rectangular meter and half long piece of cloth worn by subcontinental women to cover their heads and breasts). *She walks with small and slow steps to her brother and places his hand on his shoulder.*]

Baaghi: Today bridal beds of many a bride of Sindh become desolate and moarr flowers of many a bidegroom wither.

Dodo: Brides' bridal beds would become desolate but bridal bed of Sindh would be adorned. Moarr flowers of bridegrooms would wither but wherever their blood drops fall, red flowers would bloom there, with which brides of Sindh would adorn their back-knots on their consummation nights.

Baaghi: Brother, can't we avoid war, stop blood bath of people?

Dodo: [*cries*] Sister Baaghal!

Baaghi: [*hurriedly*] Brother, Sindh has suffered a lot, borne many torments in its history; wars, fires, massacres of its youngmen; blood of its innocent offsprings has been spilt on every inch of this land, that blood is now a smarting sore in the breast of Sindh. Do not inflict new sores on Sindh, brothe, do not have people of this land slain.

Dodo: Justice has taken on injustice since eternity. If Sindh does not let its youngmen slain today, then hands would always stretch out for shawls of daughters of Sindh and no one would be there to cut them off.

Baaghi: I, being the cause of this war and human massacre, am ready to sacrifice myself for the sake of Sindh.

Dodo: Sister, you aren't that Baaghi, whose hand in marriage Aladin has sought, but that Baaghi is Sindh and Aladin has asked us for the hand of Sindh.

Baaghi: If I'm not the cause of this war, then I'm going to remove this shawl from my head and swear that I shall not cover my bare head till you and Nangar will have won victory or laid down your lives for our homeland.

Dodo: [*removing the Turban*] We too remove the Turban from our head and swear that we shall not put it on again till we have covered the bare heads of the daughters of our homeland.

[*Baaghi steps up to the facing wall and returns with the sword hanging there, which she hands over to Dodo. He moves up, slow and steady, and unsheathes the sword with a jerk. Suddenly there comes a rumble of clouds and flash of lightning.*]

Dodo: With this sword Soomros have guarded the honour of Sindh for many years. With this sword we have slain enemies and split mountains; and afterwards when ease and comfort prevailed all over, when golden ears of grain began to flutter on earth, when air came to be filled with songs, when brides consummated their marriages, and when newborns began to suck their thumbs in the laps of their mothers, then we put this sword in its sheath. But today we've taken this sword out of its sheath as an enemy has cast a sordid glance at our honour, alien horses have stained our homeland with their hoofs. [*He looks towards his sister and placing his hand on her head says:*] We swear by the daughter of Sindh, by the soil of our homeland that we'll slay the enemies and tear the tyrants with this sword.

[*Dodo exits rapidly. Curtain falls.*]

Scene Five

[*Royal palace. Bridal bed of Koel looks more desolate and forlorn. Baaghi (in black mourning wear) and Koel (in bridal wear) are at the windows watching the battlefield through the haze of swirling dust and gravel and listening to muted cacophony of war sounds like clash of swords, swish of arrows and spears, cries of fighters and neighing of horses with thuds of their hoofs. Clouds rumble and lightning flashes intermittently.*]

Baaghi: Fighting is on. Today earth is quaking and sky is trembling in terror of intrepid Soomros.

Koel: Hear the swish of arrows. Skies are athunder.

Baaghi: See flashes of swords, just like bolts of lightning.

Koel: Horses are neighing, riders are whirling.

Baaghi: See, how heads are falling, bodies are rolling in dust, even then valiant warriors are forging ahead.

Koel: Today mighty warriors are astride horses. Look at their high heads as if they are pinnacles of heaven.

Baaghi: Look, red blood on the ground is like the colour of henna on the hands of a bride.

Koel: look, my bridegroom Nangar has riden into the battlefield. Now throats would be slashed. See the smile on his lips as swords flash and arrows swish.

Baaghi: Now he's begun his sword play. He's forging ahead reaping head and slashing throats.

Koel: Now even death can't stop him. Enemy army has panicked. Today mighty Nangar would defeat death also.

Baaghi: Earth is terrified of him, entire cosmos is atremble.

Koel: He's moving forward, roaring like a lion, raining like hailstorm, sweeping like whirlwind.

Baaghi: Hear wails of the enemy, even death is distressed.

Koel: He's borne his first wound, even then he's smiling! His face has now turned red with rage, and he's mowing and cutting through the enemy lines.

[*Suddenly feeling a chill in the air, they move away from the windows. Just then a messenger enters. His clothes and feet are dripping blood. His face is veiled. Baaghi questions him.*]

Baaghi: How is the fighting going?

Messenger: Fighting continues. Enemy is more numerous than we are, even then we'll win.

Baaghi: Wars are fought with spirit and not with large or small numbers. Even if we're defeated, our defeat would be such that no one born of a mother would dare cast an evil eye on Sindh.

Messenger: Ruler of the Realm Dodo has instructed that if we are defeated, you are to go with Bhaago Bhaan to Mamutt Abro, for they protect refuge seekers unto death.

[*Messenger bows his head and exits walking backward. Two other messengers enter. Their faces are also veiled and*

their garments are dripping blood.]

Koel: The battle, what about it?

One messenger: Battle is raging. Warriors of Sindh are on a killing spree. Battlefield is now a river of blood.

Second messenger: Channo warriors are stuck to the enemy like wasps.

First messenger: Soomro, Sammo and Sahto fighters are snuffing out the breath of the enemy like a serpent.

Second messenger: Gaahejo braves are threshing the foe like threshers.

First messenger: Sodhos have taken off their turbans from their heads and tied them around each others' waists, end to end so as to make a stand like .....

Second messenger: Like a cast lead wall.

First messenger: Like the Haalaar [mountain] Range.

Koel: Sindh is joyful today as its bravehearts are giving away their heads for it. Tell me about my Nangar.

First messenger: [*bowing his head*] Prince Nangar....

Koel: What's has happened to Nangar

Second messenger: (*in a tearful voice*) Martyred.

[*On hearing of the martyrdom of Nangar, both the princesses place their hands on their own chests. Their eyes well up with tears. But then Koel takes control of herself.*]

Koel: It isn't something to bow ones head about. Today bowed heads have been raised. You should raise your head proudly and say that my Nangar has been martyred.

Both messengers: Our heads are held aloft and shall always remain aloft.

Koel: Tell me, did my Nangar bear all his wounds on his chest or were there any on his back?

First messenger: No Sindhi has ever borne a wound in the back. As a leader of Sindhis, it couldn't be otherwise in the case of Nangar.

Koel: If he bore all his wounds on his chest, he was fit to be my bridegroom. Say, how did he go up on the bridal bed of death?

Second messenger: He struck the enemy like lightning and went on rending their chests, splitting their hearts, mowing their bodies, cutting their throats. His sword twisted and turned like lightning. Each wound that he bore made him forge ahead.

Then Nangur sustained eighteen blows of sword on his head,
Stood his ground like a rock, impervious, unmoved.

Koel: What happened next.

First messenger: Then all his parts were embedded with arrows and wounded. His whole body looked like a large quiver of arrows. Even then he went forward, dancing and prancing, until he fell down in a faint. He kissed the earth where he lay and rested his head there as a baby nestles his head in the bosom of its mother.

Koel: Blessed be the bride, who gets a bridegroom like Nangar. Blessed be the realm that gets a braveheart like Nangar.

[*Both messengers exit, another enters*]

Baaghi: The battlefield, what is latest?

Messenger: No let up in fighting, but ...

Baaghi: But what?

Messenger: Dodo has embraced martyrdom.

Baaghi: Dodo martyred! What about Sindh now when Dodo is no more?

Koel: Sindh will always have its braves. Wherever blood of Dodo and Nangar has dripped, many Dodos and Nangars will rise from there and lay down their lives for Sindh.

Baaghi: How was my brother martyred?

Messenger: After the martyrdom of Nangar, he rushed into the battlefield like a wounded lion. In one of his hands was the sword of Soomros and in another he had his special weapon *Taangar*. It was so heavy that not even ten strong men could carry it. Whirling his taangar, he charged the enemy lines. Then battle raged and thundered. There were cries and wails enerywhere, rivers of blood began to flow. Mountains split, earth began to throb in terror of Dodo. He set to chopping the enemy like carrots and radishes. Mowing through the enemy lines, he confronted Saalaar Khan, who, seeing the courage and spirit of his adversary, cried out, 'A land, which can beget brave sons like Dodo, can never be conquered by anyone.' The swords and arrows began to rain from all sides, and Dodo was wounded all over. Even then he went on fighting until strength began to seep out of his limbs, breath left him, and his knees folded under him. Dodo lay on ground, it was as if Himalaya had fallen. Earth wailed, 'Alas my brave is dead;' Sky sobbed, 'One who vied with me is martyred'; and heaven cried, 'One with higher head than I has passed away.'

Baaghi: Dodo will never die. The braveheart of earth will be born again, who will vie with sky and whose head will be higher than the heaven.

[*Presently a voice comes ringing.*]

'West is all black,
'South is all violence,
'Horses came from north,
'Sindh lost its braves,
'But moning star has arisen in the east,
'New dawn'll break, new morn'll emerge,
'New Dodos'll come, new Nangars'll come,
'Sindh'll have its braves again,
'Breeze is fragrant with scents of bridegrooms' blood,
'Breeze is fragrant with bridegrooms' blood.'

[*Koel and Baaghi listen to the voice in a kind of trance. Voice slowly fades out. Mournful music rises in the background. Bhaago Bhaan walks in. Seeing the princesses alone and helpless, his eyes become tearful. He goes forward slowly, covers bare heads of Baaghi and Koel, and places his hand on their heads. Then takes them away. Baaghi and Koel cast grieving glance at the desolate and forlorn doors and walls of the palace, look toward the denuded bridal bed of Koel. Both their eyes well up with tears. Bhaago Bhaan wipes their tears with a corner of his ajrak (a block-printed sheet of cloth peculiar to Sindh). Thus they go away looking at everything in the palace with regretful eyes. Stage becomes empty, lights go out, and eastern sky, seen from the window, begins to glow as dawn breaks.*]

[Curtain falls.]

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Ismaili and Qarmati Sects

[Whenever the Soomro protagonists in this Tale face any peril they invoke such sacred names as 'Hazrat Shah', 'Ali' or 'Maula', and thus show themselves to be of Shiite persuation, particularly of its Ismaili-Qarmati branch. The sources relied upon in the 'Intoduction' also allude to their being so. What follows is an excerpted and edited description of that branch.—Tr.]

Ismailism is the second largest branch of Shia Islam, after the mainstream Twelvers (*Ithna ashariyya*). The Ismailis get their name from their acceptance of Ismail ibn Jaafar as the appointed spiritual successor (*Imam*) to Jaafar al-Saadiq, wherein they differ from the Twelvers, who accept Musà al-Kazim, younger brother of Ismail, as the true Imam.

Tracing its earliest theology to the lifetime of Muhammad-^{SAIW}, Ismailism rose at one point to become the largest branch of Shiaism, climaxing as a political power with the Fatimid Empire in the tenth through twelfth centuries. Ismailis believe in the oneness of God, as well as the closing of divine revelation with Muhammad^{SAIW}, whom they see as the final Prophet and Messenger of God to all humanity. The Ismaili and the Twelvers both accept the same initial A'immah from the descendants of Muhammad^{SALW} through his daughter Fatimah az-Zahra and therefore share much of their early history. Both Shiate groups see the family of Muhammad^{SAIW} (Ahl al-Bayt) as divinely chosen, infallible (ismah), and guided by God to lead the Islamic community (*Ummah*), a belief that distinguishes them from the majority Sunni branch of Islam.

After the death of Muhammad ibn Ismail in the 8th century CE, the teachings of Ismailism further transformed into the belief system as it is known today, with an explicit concentration on the deeper, esoteric meaning (*batin*) of the Islamic

religion. With the eventual development of Twelverism into the more literalistic (*zahir*) oriented Akhbari and later Usooli schools of thought, Shiaism developed into two separate directions: the metaphorical Ismaili group focusing on the mystical path and nature of Allah, with the "*Imam of the Time*" representing the manifestation of truth and reality; the more literalistic Twelver group focusing on divine law (*sharia*) and the deeds and sayings (sunnah) of Muhammad[SAIW] and the Twelve Imams who were guides and a light to God.

Though there are several paths (*tariqah*) within the Ismailis, the term in today's vernacular generally refers to the *Nizari* path, which recognizes the Aga Khan IV as the 49th hereditary Imam and is the largest group among the Ismailis. While some of its branches have extremely differing exterior practices, Ismailis will say that much of their spiritual theology has remained the same since the days of the faith's early Imams. In recent centuries Ismailis have largely been an Indo-Iranian (Iran, Pakistan) community, but Ismaili minorities are also found in India, Syria, Yemen, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, East Africa, Lebanon, and South Africa, and have in recent years emigrated to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, North America and Trinidad and Tobago. Ismailism shares its beginnings with other early Shia sects that emerged during the succession crisis that spread throughout the early Muslim community. From the beginning, the Shia asserted the right of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad[SAIW], to have both political and spiritual control over the community. This also included his two sons, Hasan and Husain, who were the grandsons of Muhammad[SAIW] through his daughter Fatimah az-Zahrah.

After the assassination Ali in 661 CE, the Imamate passed on to his elder son Hasan, or according to the Nizari Ismaili belief, straight to Husain, who died alongwith his male companions on the banks of Euphrates at Kerbala in 680 CE fighting the forces of the sixth caliph Yazid for his refusal to swear allegiance to him.This battle would become extremely

important to the Shia psyche. The Twelvers, as well as *Mustaali* Ismaili still mourn this event during a holiday known as *Ashura*. The Nizari Ismaili however do not mourn this in the same way because of the belief that the light of the Imam never dies but rather passes on to the succeeding Imam, making mourning arbitrary. The extremely spiritual Ismaili institution of *Dawah* developed in the aftermath of this battle when Zainab, the real sister of Hasan and Husain, after her release by Yazid, began to spread the word of Karbala to the Muslim world through her speeches. For the Sevener Ismaili, the Imamate ended with Isma'il ibn Ja'far, whose son Muhammad ibn Ismail was the expected *Mahdi* that Jaafar al-Sadiq had preached about. Much of the Ismaili community believed that Muhammad ibn Ismail had gone into the Occultation and that he would one day return. With the status and location of the Imams not known to the community, Ismailism began to propagate the faith through *Daiyyun* from its base in Syria. The *Da'i* was not a missionary in the typical sense as he was responsible for both the conversion as well as the mental and spiritual wellbeing of his pupil. The Da'li, as light to the Imam, was a guide and the student the guided. This relationship of the guide and guided was much like the one that would develop in Sufism. The student desired God, and the Da'i could bring him to God by making him recognize the stature and light of the Imam descended from the Imams, which in turn descended from God. The Da'i was the path, and the Face of God, a Qur'anic term by which the Ismailis took to represent the Imam, was the destination.

While many of the Ismailis were content with the Dai teachings, a group that mingled Persian nationalism and Zoroastrianism with Ismaili teachings surfaced known as the Qarmatians. With their headquarters in Bahrain, they accepted a young Persian by the name of Abu'l-Fadl al-Isfahani, who claimed to be the descendant of the Persian kings, as their Mahdi. Embracing Ismailian doctrines, he devoted his powers not only to the overthrow of Arab ascendency, but to the subversion of Islam, and, indeed, of all religion. His mode of

action was by secret influence and missionary exertion. The culminating doctrine of his teaching was the vanity of all religions and the indifference of actions, the good receiving no recompense, and the bad no chastisement, either in this world or in the next. Among the followers of al-Isfahani was one named Ahmad, or, as he was afterwards called, Qarmat. He rose about the year H. 278 (CE 891), and was the founder of the Qarmatians. The term *Qarmata* or *Qarmat* belongs to a kind of Arabic writing in which the letters are very small and the lines very close. This style, being well suited for secret communications, was adopted by Ahmad, and hence he was called Qarmat and his followers Qarmati, Qaramata or Qarmatians. Teaching the doctrine that everything desirable was allowable, he differed from his predecessors by endeavouring to carry out his views by violence, and began an open unrelenting war upon the ruling powers. In H. 290 (CE 903) the Qarmatians made a fearful inroad into Syria, and in H. 311 (CE 923) they plundered Basra and Kufa. In H. 319 (CE 931) under a famous leader, Abu Tahir they took the city of Makkah with terrible slaughter, plundered the Ka'ba, and carried away the holy *hajr -ul-aswad*, or black stone, which they retained for twenty years. Ar Razi, the twentieth caliph, actually agreed to pay them an annual subsidy to secure the safe passage of the pilgrims to Makkah. Following the arrival of al-Isfahani, the sect changed its *qiblah* from Kaaba to Zoroastrian-influenced fire. After the return of the black stone in CE 951 and defeat by Abbasids in CE 976, the sect slowly dwindled and no longer has any adherents.

[Source: Internet]

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